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# Situationism and the Promise of Virtue Ethics

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Situationism and the Promise of Virtue Ethics

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

Philosophy

College of Arts and Sciences

University of South Carolina

2015

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## **Abstract**

In this dissertation, I argue that it is possible to develop an empirically adequate form of virtue ethics even if one grants that situationism is true. I define situationism as a skeptical thesis about globalism, or the thesis that temporally stable and trans-situationally consistent character and personality traits are widely instantiated. Situationists such as John Doris and Gilbert Harman argue that globalism is an empirically inadequate thesis.

While I accept Doris and Harman's situationist thesis, they also make a further argument which is the subject of this dissertation. They argue that since globalism is empirically inadequate and Aristotelian virtue ethics is committed to globalism, it follows that Aristotelian virtue ethics is also empirically inadequate. I reject both the minor premise and the conclusion of this argument. I argue that it is possible to construct a form of virtue ethics in which virtues are not understood as global character traits but as habits. Therefore, whatever problems Doris and Harman uncover for the empirical adequacy of globalism do not affect a theory which need not be committed to globalism.

By itself, the construction an empirically adequate form of virtue ethics with habits instead of global character traits is not sufficient as a rejoinder to Doris and Harman. In order to be sufficient as a rejoinder, this form of virtue ethics must also be normatively

adequate by enabling those who develop such habits to do what they have moral reasons to do. In addition, since virtue ethics is an Aristotelian tradition, such a theory must also be consistent with the claims that Aristotle made about normative ethics in such works as *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Eudaemian Ethics*. I argue that my account of virtue ethics meets all three criteria.

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## **Introduction**

Prior to the late 1950s, the two dominant types of moral theories were deontic theories. These theories, broadly speaking were consequentialist theories which traced their origins to Jeremy Bentham and deontological theories which traced their origins to Immanuel Kant. Beginning in 1958, however, virtue ethics began experiencing a revival when Elizabeth Anscombe wrote a groundbreaking paper titled “Modern Moral Philosophy” in which she argued that deontic concepts such as the moral “ought” only has a foundation within a worldview which presupposed the existence of a divine lawgiver. In a modern worldview which no longer presupposes such a lawgiver, however, such concepts lack any foundation and only remain in use because they are associated with certain emotions.<sup>1</sup> Anscombe claimed that if it is psychologically possible, moral philosophers should therefore replace deontic concepts like the moral ought with Aristotelian concepts such as virtue and flourishing. Prior to doing this, however, Anscombe called for a moratorium on moral philosophy until adequate work in psychology was first done in order to determine what was, in fact, psychologically possible.

Although the decades since Anscombe’s paper have seen a renaissance of Aristotelian virtue ethics, recently situationists have argued that the very return to work in psychology that Anscombe called for creates serious difficulties for virtue ethics. Most

forms of virtue ethics are empirically inadequate, these situationists claim, because experimental social psychology indicates that human agents are not psychologically structured in the way that Aristotle presupposes they are structured.<sup>2</sup> According to situationists such as John Doris and Gilbert Harman, virtue ethics could be empirically adequate if people instantiate global character traits, but there is little to no empirical support for such a claim and plenty of empirical evidence against it.

In this dissertation, I argue that situationists are right to be skeptical of the empirical adequacy of a virtue ethics which defines virtues as global character traits, defining virtues in this manner is not the only good option for virtue ethics. Virtue ethicists, I claim, would be better off defining virtues as ordinary habits. I argue that such a theory can be more empirically adequate than the kind of virtue ethics that relies on global character traits without any loss of normative adequacy.

In order to make clear my thesis, it is first necessary to do some philosophical spadework by both defining virtue ethics and situationism. Virtue ethics can be defined with little difficulty, but in order to define situationism several other concepts also need to be defined for the sake of making the definition clear.

## **Virtue Ethics**

There is considerable controversy over the definition of virtue ethics in normative ethics, but there seems to at least be a consensus around the claim that any normative ethical theory in which virtue is the most basic concept is a form of virtue ethics.<sup>3</sup> Virtue ethics is distinct from virtue theory, however, inasmuch as virtue theory is a theory of



moral psychology and a theory of what the virtues are. Every virtue ethicist must subscribe to some kind of virtue theory, but a moral psychologist who subscribes to a particular virtue theory will not necessarily be a virtue ethicist.<sup>4</sup> With this distinction in mind, in this dissertation I will be advancing a virtue theory according to which virtues are habits, but I also have the further aim of arguing that a form of virtue ethics which is built on such a theory is both empirically and normatively adequate.

### **The Concepts of Situationism**

I have stated that situationists are skeptical about global character traits, and so in order to give a thorough definition of situationism it will be necessary to first define global character traits as well as all the concepts which will make this definition clear before turning to the nature of the situationist's skepticism.

#### *Global Character Traits*

A global character trait is obviously a type of character trait, but before stating what makes a particular character trait global, I will begin with a preliminary definition of character traits.

In this project I will be arguing for the thesis that a sub-set of habits are identical to character traits and some character traits are identical to virtues. For our present purposes, however, I am only interested in defining character traits for the purpose of understanding situationism.

Notwithstanding my own view, there seems to be a consensus in both psychology and philosophy that every character trait is a personality trait, but the precise relationship between personality traits and character traits is more controversial. Some argue that the set of personality traits is identical to character traits, but this seems false for the following reason.<sup>5</sup> While the set of personality traits includes traits such as wittiness, talkativeness, introversion, courageousness and compassion it would seem odd to call all of these character traits. While the last of these traits, courageousness and compassion seems to be character traits, these kinds of traits seem to be distinct in some way from ordinary personality traits such as wittiness, talkativeness and introversion, but it is not easy to say what this distinction is. Putting my own view aside, one way of explaining this distinction is to define character traits as a subset of personality traits, but in order to make this distinction clearer, I will begin with a definition of personality traits in general so that I can proceed to defining character traits with greater specificity.

### *Personality Traits*

There are a number of ways of defining personality traits, but not all definitions of personality will be relevant for the purpose of understanding situationism. In fact, since I have stated that situationists are skeptical about global personality and character traits, only one definition of personality will be relevant for our purposes. This is the definition of personality traits which those who defend globalist conceptions of

personality traits would agree on. In the field of personality psychology, those who defend such conceptions are generally known as *dispositionists*.<sup>6</sup>

The definition of personality traits which I am using comes from Gordon Allport, the founder of the trait theory of personality. Trait theory is a form of dispositionism which became distinguished from another form of dispositionism known as psychodynamic theory over the issue of whether a subject's behavior should be taken as direct or only indirect evidence of the presence of a personality trait within the subject. Despite his differences with psychodynamic theorists, I think Allport's definition of a personality trait is one which dispositionists can generally agree on, and it is therefore appropriate to use for this project.

For Allport, as the fundamental dispositions of personality, personality traits should be distinguished not only from personality types, but also from *psychophysical* systems such as habits and attitudes. Habits, attitudes and dispositions are all *psychophysical* for Allport, since they are neither purely mental nor physical, and he defined personality as the dynamic organization of these psychophysical systems.<sup>7</sup> Personality traits are distinct from these other concepts and psychophysical systems since they are marked by a broad range of behaviors, they have more than a nominal existence, they can be said to belong to a subject and they have no well-defined object of reference.

For Allport, the fact that personality traits can belong to a subject distinguishes them from personality types. One can be said to "have" a personality trait but cannot be said to have a personality "type". Rather, it is more appropriate to speak of one as "fitting" a type.<sup>8</sup> For Allport, the distinction is due to the fact that types have no more

than a nominal existence and are used only for the purposes of making social classifications. The fact that personality traits are marked by a broad range of behaviors distinguishes them from habits, since habits such as tooth brushing concern too narrow a range of behaviors to be considered a personality trait, although tooth brushing might be the component of the broader trait of personal cleanliness. Finally, the fact that personality traits have no definite object of reference distinguishes them from attitudes. One could have an unfavorable attitude toward eating meat, but a trait of kindness or compassion which might include an unfavorable attitude toward eating meat nonetheless lacks a specific object of reference.

Because personality traits are dispositions, there are a few things worth noting about them. First, they are not momentary mental states or token acts. Someone could feel shyly or act shyly at a particular moment in time, but they would not necessarily be a shy person. In addition, it would be possible to have a personality trait without ever displaying that trait. Someone could be shy, but they would never act shyly because they live on a deserted island where they are never in the company of unfamiliar people. Nonetheless, they are still shy because they act shyly when they are either in the company of unfamiliar people or they are presented with the opportunity to be in the company of unfamiliar people. What makes it the case that a given individual has a personality trait  $t$ , therefore, is not how frequently they act in  $t$  ways, but how frequently they act in  $t$  ways given the conditions that would stimulate  $t$  behavior for whoever has a personality trait  $t$ .

Furthermore, because personality traits are also dispositions which are psychophysical, they are neither purely mental nor physical. For this reason, it is also possible for someone to act as if they have a certain personality trait when they don't have that trait at all. For any number of reasons, a person could choose to act shy around strangers when she is only pretending to be shy. But even if she has reasons to act shyly every time she is in the presence of strangers such a condition would not be sufficient to make her have the personality trait of shyness. In addition to shy behavior, she would need to have the mental states that are consistent with shyness. If she only acts shy around strangers but she never feels shy, then she is not shy but only pretending to be shy. Without being able to look inside a person's head and see their mental states, a person's behavior would be the best evidence one has (although not the only evidence) to judge whether or not they have a certain personality trait such as shyness. Nonetheless, what one is judging in this case is not merely how one behaves but what one is disposed to think and feel.

To define traits as dispositions risks defining the obscure with the more obscure, since the precise definition of a disposition is a major controversy in metaphysics. Among metaphysicians, the classical definition of a disposition (hereafter CDD) is that S is disposed to M when C if S would M if it were the case that C.<sup>9</sup> Thus, according to this definition, a glass object has a fragile disposition because it will break if it is struck by a hard object with a force of f. CDD has become subject to a number of counterexamples among metaphysicians, however, who claim that CDD does not provide the right conditions for having a disposition. A counterexample which raises doubts about

whether CDD provides the necessary conditions for having a disposition is a state in which a glass object is enveloped in packing material. In such a state, a glass object will not break when it is struck by a hard object with  $f$ , even though it still seems to have the disposition of fragility. Counterexamples can also be raised as to whether CDD provides the sufficient conditions for having a disposition. Wooden objects do not seem to be fragile, although a wooden object could shatter whenever it is struck by a hard object with force  $f$  if it were in the proximity of a certain machine. This machine could detect whenever it was struck by a hard object and immediately trigger an explosive which shattered the wooden object.

Due to these counterexamples, it may be difficult to find a precise definition for a disposition. It is worth noting, however, that not all metaphysicians are convinced that these counterexamples, and defend CDD in light of these counterexamples.<sup>10</sup> Despite this lack of consensus about CDD, for the purposes of this project I claim that CDD provides us with a good approximation of the definition of a disposition, even if a more precise definition remains elusive.

### *Character Traits*

So far, I have stated that for the purpose of understanding situationism, personality traits should be defined as psychophysical dispositions which are distinct from habits, attitudes and types, and that character traits are a species of personality traits. What follows from this definition is that character traits are also psychophysical dispositions which are distinct from habits, attitudes and types. Unlike other personality traits,

however, character traits seem to have “thick” properties. A thick property is a property that is the referent of thick terms. Thick terms such as “courageous” are terms with both evaluative and descriptive meanings, while “thin” terms such as “right” and “good” are terms with evaluative meanings and no descriptive content. To call Achilles “courageous”, for example, is not only to praise him but to describe him as being disposed to confront danger. On the other hand, to call someone “cowardly” is to not only describe them as being disposed to run away from danger, but to blame them for such behavior. Character traits are not the only entities with thick properties. It seems clear that token acts can have such properties as well. Not only can someone be courageous, but they can act courageously.

This way of stating the distinction between personality and character traits might be met with some skepticism, since not everyone is convinced that there are any thick properties. Such skeptics do not deny that there are properties which are the referent of so-called “thick” terms, but they would deny that such terms are embedded with both particular descriptive and evaluative meanings. Therefore they deny that such terms refer to any thick properties. Simon Blackburn is skeptical about the existence of such thick terms, for example, as he argues that a putatively thick term such as “lewd” doesn’t have a particular fixed evaluative meaning. Under many circumstances, to describe something as “lewd” is to criticize it. However, one can conceive of someone praising some behavior with the word “lewd” as in “This year’s carnival was not lewd enough.”

I am not convinced that Blackburn's use of the word "lewd" in this case is a counterexample to the claim that to call something "lewd" is to criticize it. I therefore do not think that Blackburn shows that thick terms such as "lewd" lack fixed evaluative meanings. I suspect that when someone is using the word "lewd" to praise some behavior she is not really calling the behavior lewd, but she is using the word "lewd" with inverted commas. In other words, when saying "This year's carnival was not lewd enough", what one is really saying is "This year's carnival was not 'lewd' enough" or "This year's carnival was not what other people call 'lewd'".<sup>11</sup> Insofar as others are skeptical of thick terms, however, they may be skeptical of analysis of character traits as thick terms.

### **Situationism and Global Character Traits Defined**

As a theory in personality psychology, situationism is the claim that the behavior of human subjects is better explained by situational forces than by personality traits whenever persons and situations interact.<sup>12</sup> For the purposes of this project, however, I am only interested in the way that Doris and Harman define situationism. Situationism, as Doris defines it, is a skeptical thesis about globalism, which is a conjunction to the three following propositions:

- (1) Character and personality traits are reliably manifested in trait-relevant behavior across trait-relevant eliciting conditions that may vary widely in their conduciveness to the manifestation of the trait in question.



(2) Character and personality traits are reliably manifested in trait-relevant behaviors over iterated trials of similar trait-relevant eliciting conditions.

(3) In a given character or personality, the occurrence of a trait with a particular evaluative valence is probabilistically related to the occurrence of other traits with similar evaluative valences.<sup>13</sup>

The conjunction of (1)-(3) does not entail that situationists as such are skeptical about all character traits, but only those global character traits which, up until this point, I have been unable to fully define. However, now that I have defined character and personality traits, I can define global character traits as those character traits which have three particular features, namely, trans-situational consistency, temporal stability and evaluative integration. The trans-situational feature of such traits entails that they can be stimulated in a wide variety of kinds of situations; the temporal stability of such traits entails that they can be stimulated in either similar or different situations over a long period of time and evaluative integration entails that an agent who instantiates a character trait with a particular positive valence (e.g. courage) is more likely to instantiate other character traits with a positive valence (e.g. compassion) than they are to instantiate character traits with a negative valence (e.g. selfishness). In the same manner, those who instantiate character traits with a negative valence are also more likely to instantiate other character traits with negative valences than they are to instantiate those traits with positive valences.<sup>14</sup>

Defining situationism as *skepticism* about globalism may not be greatly informative, since it should now be clear that there are at least two ways in which one can be skeptical of globalism by being skeptical of global character traits as I have defined them. First, it is possible to argue that there are no thick properties and there would therefore need to be another way to distinguish character traits from personality traits which are not character traits. Second, it is possible to raise objections to CDD and perhaps any definition of a disposition. Skeptics who pursue these two strategies may not deny that it is possible to instantiate traits that are similar to character traits as I have defined them, but they would argue that new definitions of such traits are needed.

Unlike those who might pursue these two strategies, situationists are not interested in raising metaphysical objections to my definition of character traits. The situationist is instead skeptical that such traits are instantiated in agents who are psychologically structured in the way that they argue human agents are structured, if the data from experimental social psychology is to be trusted.

Since situationism involves empirical claims, it is possible to falsify these claims with sufficient empirical evidence. In this dissertation, however, I neither attempt to falsify situationism nor defend globalism against the skeptical claims of situationists. As I have stated above, I argue against one of Doris and Harman's further claims, namely that insofar as one has good reasons to be skeptical of globalism, one has equally good reasons to be skeptical of the empirical adequacy of Aristotelian virtue ethics.

I proceed as follows. In Chapter One, I reconstruct the case for situationism based on both the empirical evidence for the non-existence of global character traits and the lack of evidence for the existence of these traits. In Chapter Two, I turn to the project of constructing my own account of virtue ethics. In this account, while I grant that virtues are a sub-set of character traits, the character traits which Aristotle prescribes developing are not global personality traits but rather a subset of habits. In Chapter Three, I reconstruct the various ways of defending virtue ethics against the situationist critique which currently exist in the literature on this topic. Finally, in Chapter Four I argue that my reply to situationism is successful in doing what all the other existing replies fail to do, namely, meeting all the criteria for an adequate reply to situationism.

## **Chapter 1: The Case for Situationism**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I reconstruct Doris and Harman's situationist challenge to virtue ethics. The challenge, for Doris and Harman, is that if one wishes to have an ethical theory which prescribes the development of "global" character traits and which is also informed by the findings of social psychology, one will end up with a theory which is either normatively or empirically inadequate, or both. For Doris and Harman, moreover, since most forms of virtue ethics prescribe the development of such global traits, it follows that most forms of virtue ethics are either normatively or empirically inadequate, or both. Any attempt to form an empirically adequate form of virtue ethics which grounds virtues in global traits that most people can develop will end up with traits which are generally unresponsive to all or most of an agent's moral reasons. On the other hand, any attempt to form a normatively adequate form of virtue ethics around global character traits will end up with character traits which most people will never be able to instantiate.

My reconstruction of the situationist challenge to virtue ethics will be in two sections. In Section One, I reconstruct the situationist argument for skepticism about global character traits. In Section Two, I state why situationists claim that their skeptical

thesis make certain forms of virtue ethics untenable, and why other forms of virtue ethics may withstand their worries.

### **Section 1.1 The Case for Skepticism About Global Character Traits**

In the introduction of this dissertation, I stated that while Doris and Harman are both skeptical of the existence of character traits with the features of trans-situational consistency and evaluative integration, only Harman is skeptical of character traits with the feature of temporal stability. For the sake of simplicity, however, I am reconstructing the case for skepticism in this chapter by focusing only on those points on which Doris and Harman agree. I am therefore limiting my reconstruction of the case for such skepticism in this section to the evidence for skepticism about trans-situationally consistent and evaluatively integrated character traits.

In this section I proceed by first reconstructing the case for skepticism about trans-situational consistency. I then turn to the case for evaluative integration.

#### **Section 1.1.1 Skepticism about Trans-Situational Character Traits**

Skepticism about the existence of trans-situational character traits should be understood as skepticism about the claim that behavior can best be explained by the existence of trans-situational character traits, but it should not be confused with skepticism about either of the following claims. First, it is not skepticism about the claim that in many novel situations in which a given subject's behavior has never been observed, one can probably predict how the subject will behave. Thus, even if George has never observed Nancy as a motorist in the United States, George can still safely

predict that Nancy will probably drive on the right side of the road in the United States.

We can safely predict that most anyone will drive on the right side of the road in the United States, but there is no need to explain this behavior by any appeal to trans-situational traits.<sup>15</sup> Situations in which behavior is nearly uniform are usually powerful situations, because it is natural to expect that whatever subjects' personality differences, the consequences of failing to act in a particular way in such situations are so dire that most everyone will choose to avoid these consequences.<sup>16</sup>

Second, skepticism about the existence of trans-situational character traits should also not be confused with the claim that people are often observed to act in consistent ways in markedly different situations. George could be observed to act shyly at office parties and shyly in bars, but this consistency in behavior does not provide evidence that George instantiates a single trans-situational trait of shyness. For the situationist, it is just as likely that George instantiates two local traits of shyness such as "bar-shyness" and "office-party-shyness".

What skepticism about trans-situational traits does entail, however, is that one cannot predict with any high-degree of probability how a given subject will behave in a novel weak situation given that she has behaved a certain way in a different kind of weak situation. A situation is weak if there are few consequences for behaving in any given way in that situation. Situationists such as Doris and Harman claim that if there were sufficient evidence for the existence of trans-situational character traits, then if one has never observed a particular subject in a particular kind of weak situation, one should be able to predict how the subject would behave in that situation with a high

degree of probability given how she has behaved in other distinct weak situations.

Because such predictions are unwarranted, however, there is little reason to believe in the existence of global character traits.

Before turning to this evidence for this kind of skepticism, it is worth noting that the case for skepticism about trans-situational character traits is primarily based on indirect empirical evidence. According to Doris, direct evidence for the non-instantiation of robust character traits would come in the form of “longitudinal” studies in which one observes a subject’s behavior over long periods of time and across a broad range of situations.<sup>17</sup> Conducting such studies is normally precluded by logistical considerations, however, and therefore the studies which support situationism are based on evidence from trans-situational studies in which behavior is observed in a few situations over a relatively short period of time, or even studies in which behavior is observed in only one situation. Such studies can only allow us to speculate about what a subject would do in most situations throughout a lifetime as behaving in a trait-contrary way in only one or two situations in a lifetime is still consistent with the possession of that trait. These limitations notwithstanding, Doris and Harman argue that the best explanation of why so many subjects are observed to behave in trait-contrary ways in these studies is that most people do not have the kinds of global character traits that would make such trait-contrary behavior highly improbable.<sup>18</sup>

Situationist skepticism about the trans-situational nature of global character traits is based on claims about both the lack of sufficient empirical evidence for the existence of

trans-situational character traits and sufficient empirical evidence for the non-existence of trans-situational character traits. I begin with the former.

#### **Section 1.1.1.1 The Lack of Data for Trans-Situational Character Traits**

In order to review the situationist claims about the lack of evidence for trans-situational character traits, I should begin by noting that situationists such as Doris and Harman are willing to grant that there is a large body of putative evidence for the instantiation of trans-situational personality traits in the form of data from *psychometric* tests, or tests which are designed to measure the degree to which a subject instantiates a particular set of personality traits. In addition, they grant that there is anecdotal evidence for the existence of trans-situational personality traits. However, they are skeptical of value of either of these kinds of evidence for reasons I will now reconstruct.

##### **Section 1.1.1.1.1 Psychometric Tests**

Many of the worries which Doris and Harman have about the value of psychometric tests were first raised by Walter Mischel in his 1968 *Personality and Assessment*. The data from psychometric tests of which Mischel is skeptical, otherwise known as “Q-data”, can either take the form of answers to ‘self-reports’ in which a respondent reports about his habits, affective states, likes, dislikes and so forth in a standardized questionnaire, or a rating by an observer in which an respondent provides answers to similar questions about someone she knows. Among psychologists, Q-data is distinct from a subjects “life records” or “L-data,” which includes such data as a subject’s arrest



record, divorces, credit history, and academic grade reports, and “T-data” which is limited to data from direct observations of behavior.<sup>19</sup>

In order to appreciate the way in which Mischel is skeptical of the value of Q-data, it is important to distinguish a test’s reliability from its validity. A test is considered reliable if its repeated administrations will yield the same results and it is considered valid if it actually measures what it purports to measure. Unlike an essay, an oral interview and another unstructured personality test which could have a different score for each person scoring it, psychometric inventories usually take the form of standardized multiple choice tests. In scoring such tests, little latitude is allowed in interpreting the results and it is therefore difficult to doubt their reliability. Mischel doubts their validity, however, as he claim that far from measuring actual personality traits, such tests only measure a respondent’s conceptions of personality.

Mischel’s doubts about the validity of psychometric tests are due to frequent low correlations between Q-data and both L and T-data. Mischel explains that dispositionists have long recognized this low correlation, and have explained it on the basis of problems with self-reports. Accordingly, dispositionists argue that self-reports are often unreliable because respondents are both prone to exaggerate their good qualities and to downplay their negative qualities. Mischel grants that this is one problem with self-reports.<sup>20</sup> However, he claims that there are also several reasons for believing that a better explanation for this poor correspondence has less to do with self-reports alone and more to do with problems which plague all psychometric tests, namely, far from

providing evidence for the actual existence of personality traits, such inventories only report on a respondent's conception of various personality traits. These reasons Mischel gives for making such an inference are due to both the vagueness of psychometric tests and studies of cognitive limitations. I will now consider both of these reasons in turn.

### *The Vagueness of Psychometric Tests*

Mischel argues that psychometric tests are unacceptably vague in two important ways. First, such tests often ask subjects to go beyond reporting a subject's behavior to interpreting behavior and thus make psychological inferences about a subject. For instance, in such an inventory a respondent can be asked how "generous" a subject is on a scale of 1 to 7.<sup>21</sup> Secondly, such inventories also offer ambiguous response choices such as 'often' and 'frequently' without specifying how often or frequently the subject is supposed to engage in a certain behavior before the behavior can count as occurring 'often' or 'frequently'. Such questions, Mischel argues, are inappropriate for measuring personality traits since without an explicit referent for words like 'generous' and 'frequently' such inventories only end up quizzing subjects about their own conceptions of (say) what a generous person is or how often a subject must perform an action before doing it 'frequently'.<sup>22</sup>

### *Studies on Cognitive Limitations*

One study on cognitive limitations which, for Mischel raises skepticism about the value of psychometric tests is a 1956 study conducted by George Miller concluded that most people usually cannot discriminate between more than seven alternatives on a

unidimensional variable, or remember more than a range of five to nine items from any list.<sup>23</sup> Other studies suggest that this range is between three and seven.<sup>24</sup> In 1968, Mischel claimed that given these cognitive limitations, it was telling that among trait theorists, consensus was emerging around five factors that could be used to explain any individual's personality structure,<sup>25</sup> a consensus the emergence of which is now complete.<sup>26</sup> For Mischel, these studies on cognitive limitations suggest that while using five factors on psychometric tests, rather than more or less, is not arbitrary, the real reason for this choice of factors may have less to do with an accurate measurement of true personality traits and more to do with a number that is easy to remember.

#### **Section 1.1.1.1.2 Antecedotal Evidence for Trans-Situational Traits**

Situationists argue that skepticism about trans-situational character traits is not undermined by antecedotal evidence for the existence of such traits chiefly for four reasons. These reasons concern (a) the limited range of situations in which people interact, (b) the phenomenon of self-fulfilling prophecies in social relationships, (c) the variability of situational construal and (d) the existence of cognitive biases which affect judgments about personality. I will now consider each of these in turn.

##### *The Limited Range of Situations in Which People Interact*

The limited range of situations in which people interact provides situationists with a reason to doubt the antecedotal evidence for trans-situational character traits for the following reason. Doris admits that people are often observed to display a great degree of consistency in their behavior and it is therefore easy to infer that they instantiate

trans-situational personality traits from this sample. If there is no reason to doubt that the kinds of situations that we observe people in are representative of the full range of situations that they could ever be in, then such an inference would be justified. But such an inference is not justified precisely because the antecedent of the preceding conditional statement is false. The situations in which we often observe people are not representative of the full range of situations that they could be in, or so Doris argues. According to Doris, we observe people in a narrow range of circumstances and therefore whatever consistency we observe in the behavior of people such as spouses, classmates, coworkers may be due to the fact that most of our interactions with our spouses are at home; most of our interactions with classmates are in the classroom, and most of our interactions with coworkers are at work.<sup>27</sup> As we have already seen, consistent behavior in a narrow range of circumstances does not tell against situationism, but the strong body of empirical data supporting situationism suggests that we cannot make justified inferences about people's behavior in a broad range of situations on the basis of their behavior in a narrow range of situations.

### *Self-Fulfilling Prophecies*

In a study of self-fulfilling prophecies, Rosenthal and Jacobson conducted a study in which they found that when a subject is told that someone has a certain personality trait, the subject will begin acting toward the person in a way that facilitates behavior that is consistent with that trait.<sup>28</sup> For example, if Jane is told that Ginger is friendly, then Jane will be more inclined to begin a conversation with Ginger, invite her to social

events and do other things that will facilitate Ginger's friendliness than she would if she were told that Ginger is unfriendly. What this study suggests is that while Jane might take Ginger's friendliness toward her as evidence that she has a robust personality trait of friendliness, in fact Ginger has not displayed any true evidence of such a trait at all. At most, the only thing that Ginger has shown regarding her personal traits is that she has a more fine-grained trait of friendliness when other people are friendly to her. However, on the basis of such behavior one cannot infer anything about how Ginger will behave when someone is hostile or even indifferent to her.

#### *Variability of Social Construal*

The variability of situational construal warrants skepticism about the value of anecdotal evidence for global character traits for the following reason. According to Ross and Nisbett, most people are unaware of the variety of ways in which a single situation could be interpreted by multiple observers.<sup>29</sup> For example, we can suppose that Jane sees a stranger introduce herself to her friend Barbara in a public place. Jane explains the stranger's behaving this way as being due to the fact that she must be a lonely person who wants nothing more than to make new friends, and she assumes that Barbara will explain the stranger's behavior in the same way. Jane is unaware, however, that because of her past experiences, Barbara has a reasonable suspicion of any stranger who introduces herself to her. Barbara is therefore receives the stranger's introduction coldly. Moreover, since Jane is unaware that Barbara might have a reason

to regard the stranger with suspicion, she construes Barbara's behavior as evidence that she is simply unfriendly.

It is easy to see how this failure to consider the multiple ways of construing a single situation can lead to erroneous judgments about trans-situational traits. If someone such as Jane expects that the way she interprets a situation is the one "objective" way of interpreting it, then she will expect that everyone else will interpret the situation in the same way. However, suppose that Barbara does not act as Jane would expect her to act because she does not share this so-called "objective" interpretation. If Jane is not aware of other possible ways of interpreting this situation, then she cannot explain Barbara's behavior by reference to an alternative interpretation. Moreover, if the only explanation Jane has for Barbara's behavior would reference Barbara's personality, then she must claim that the cause of Barbara's behavior has something to do with her, such as her "unfriendliness".

### *Cognitive Biases*

Two cognitive biases which are purported to affect judgments about personality and character are the fundamental attribution error (FAE) and the confirmation bias, both of which are supported by experimental studies. I will define both of these biases and reconstruct the experimental evidence for them in turn briefly reconstruct the experimental evidence and then consider how both biases supposedly warrant skepticism about the anecdotal data we are considering.

FAE, according to Nisbett and Ross, is tendency to assign more causal responsibility for outcomes to a personal agent than to a situation.<sup>30</sup> Nisbett and Ross believe that FAE has the availability bias and the vividness bias as its components. Let us briefly state the nature of each of these components. The former is the bias of allowing inferences about the probability of an event to be influenced by examples of the event that can easily be brought to mind or which are closest to one's perception.<sup>31</sup> Thus, a smoker who is affected by this bias might claim that it is unlikely that smoking will damage his health since his father was a smoker and lived to be 100. In the same manner, a spectator affected by FAE might infer that a tennis player will likely win most of his matches based on one remarkable performance that he has witnessed even when he is told that the tennis player has a dismal record. The performance the spectator has seen is "perceptually more proximate" to him than the tennis player's overall record, and therefore FAE causes him to make a bad inductive inference.<sup>32</sup>

The vividness bias is similar to the availability bias, except that this bias involves showing an unwarranted preference for what is vivid and interesting and the availability bias involves showing an unwarranted preference for what is most proximate or memorable. One who is affected by the vividness bias will ignore statistical information in favor of a highly vivid instance. For example, an interesting story that a neighbor told about her experience with a certain model of car would be more important for a potential buyer who is affected by this bias than information about how well the car rates compared to other models in a consumer magazine.<sup>33</sup> In the same manner, one who is affected by FAE will display an unwarranted preference for personal explanations

over situational ones for behavior, since the agent is more “dynamic and interesting” than the situation which is more “static and pallid”.<sup>34</sup>

Two studies which support the existence of FAE are Jones and Harris<sup>35</sup> and Ross et al. In Jones and Harris’ study, subjects were asked to state what an author’s true attitude toward Castro was after reading either a pro-Castro or anti-Castro essay that the author had written. Jones and Harris found that the subjects were usually convinced that the author had the same opinion about Castro as she was expressing in the essay, even though the subjects were informed that the author had no choice in whether she would write a pro-Castro or anti-Castro essay. For Jones and Harris, this startling study suggested that subjects were affected by a bias which caused them to ignore the best explanation for why each author support particular opinions about Castro, namely that they were in a situation in which they were *told* to support that opinion. From this study, Jones and Harris concluded that they had discovered a bias which can cause subjects to favor personal explanations of an agent’s behavior even in the face of overwhelming evidence that the best explanation for an agent’s behavior is a situational one.

In Ross’ study, subjects were assigned ‘questioner’ and ‘contestant’ roles in a quiz game. In this game, the former group was allowed to devise their own trivia questions on whatever subjects they preferred.<sup>36</sup> This format obviously favors the questioner since it allows the history teacher, for example, to display her knowledge of obscure historical facts and the auto-technician to display her knowledge of obscure facts about auto-mechanics to which the average contestant will not be privy. But in explaining this



display of knowledge, both the contestants and third party observers of the quiz game attributed it to the questioner's "intelligence" rather than to the role which he was assigned in the quiz game. Thus, in behavior that is consistent with FAE, the subjects in this experiment ignored the better situational explanation of the questioners' behavior in favor of an explanation that relied on the questioner's personal traits.

The confirmation bias causes those who form hypotheses from limited evidence to tend to persist in believing their hypotheses even in the face of evidence to the contrary. Those who are affected by this bias will tend to either ignore this undermining evidence or explain it away. Among the many studies which support the existence of this bias includes one in which subjects were shown an extremely blurry slide of a certain picture which was followed by a long series of increasingly clearer slides of that picture.<sup>37</sup> The study found that many of the subjects who formed an initial hypothesis about what the extremely blurry slides represented persisted in this hypothesis long after those who were not shown the extremely blurry slides knew what they represented.

Situationists argue that both the confirmation bias and FAE cause so many people to claim to observe evidence of the instantiation of global character traits when no such evidence exists for the following reasons. By causing observing subjects to overlook situational explanations of behavior, it should be clear that FAE can cause certain behaviors to be judged as evidence of a trait when such behaviors in fact only provide evidence of the power of a situation. This is not to deny that FAE is compatible with the existence of traits since judging that *p has trait t* can either be caused by FAE or by the

trait itself. Thus, if I judge that Elaine is shy because she is acting shyly, it could be that Elaine really is shy even though she is in a situation that is conducive to shyness.

However, while evidence for FAE does not prove that global personality traits do not exist, it at least suggests that those who infer that *p has trait t* on the basis of *p's* behavior may make such an inference because they are ignoring a better explanation for *p's* behavior. FAE causes observers to overlook obvious situational explanations of why agents behave as they do even when these situational factors would provide better explanations of behavior than the agent's putative personality traits.

Like FAE, situationists argue that the confirmation bias undermines anecdotal evidence for personality traits in the following way. The existence of this bias suggests that it is possible to judge that *p has trait t* even if *p's* total set of behaviors that are relevant to *t* would make such a judgment unwarranted. If the initial behaviors that *p* displays to an observer are consistent with *t*, then an observer may either overlook or explain away *p's* later behaviors that are inconsistent with *t* and become convinced that she has only seen behavior from *p* that would support the claim that *p has trait t*. For example, let us suppose that Bob became convinced that Abe is honest because he has observed Abe tell the truth on a few occasions. If Bob is affected by the confirmation bias, then even if Abe later tells lies, Bob is likely to explain that these lies "were only little white lies" or "half-truths" or find some other similar strategy to deny that these lies undermine his original hypothesis.

### **Section 1.1.1.2 Data Supporting the Non-Existence of Trans-Situational Traits**

Situationists claim that the evidence for the non-existence of trans-situational character traits comes from three sources, namely, data on trans-situational correlations, studies of social influences, and studies of mood effects. I will begin this sub-section by reconstructing these three sources of data. However, since most of this data comes from one off studies of behavior, I will also end this sub-section by explaining why situationists claim that this body of data is sufficient to warrant skepticism about trans-situational character traits.

#### *Data from Trans-Situational Correlations*

The data from trans-situational correlations comes from a number of studies which report extremely low correlations between trait-relevant behaviors across situations, although such studies also report much higher correlations between trait-relevant behaviors in repeated trials of the same situation. For example, while an agent could demonstrate consistently temperate (or self-controlled) behavior in gatherings of fewer than ten people, such studies could also show that the agent demonstrates consistently self-indulgent behavior in gatherings of ten or more. The data from such studies supports Doris' claim that agents generally instantiate fine-grained local traits such as "small-group-temperance" for example, or perhaps even "small-group-of-friends-temperance" but Doris claims that such studies would not support the claim that agents generally instantiate robust traits such as "temperance" *simpliciter*. The most famous study of trans-situational correlations is Hartshorne and May's 1928 study of 8000

schoolchildren which found a mean intercorrelation of trans-situational honesty.<sup>38</sup> The types of situations which Hartshorne and May compared included cheating on a test by copying answers from a key and continuing to work on a test after time was called. Although Hartshorne and May found mean intercorrelations as high as .70 among honest behavior in repeated trials of the same situation, the mean intercorrelation for trans-situational honesty was only .23. Even lower mean correlations have been found in other studies. For example, Mischel and Peake found a mean intercorrelation of only .08 in a trans-situational study of conscientiousness in college students.<sup>39</sup>

#### *Data from Studies of Mood Effects*

Situationists argue that this body of data supports the thesis that trait-relevant behavior is better explained by the fluctuations of an agent's mood than by the presence of global character traits. One study which supports this thesis is Isen and Levin's experiments which studied the way in which finding a dime in a phone booth would determine a subject's willingness to help a confederate pick up dropped papers.<sup>40</sup> Isen and Levin found that 87 percent of those who found a dime helped the confederate, while 96 percent of those who did not find a dime did not help. Another study found that cooperative behavior is more likely to occur in a situation in which pleasant aromas abound than in a situation with neutral aromas.<sup>41</sup> These studies suggest that situations that include such stimuli as pleasant scents and small bits of change affect behavior in indirect ways. These stimuli alter an agent's mood, which, in turn, affects whether she acts in pro-social or anti-social ways.

### *Data from Studies on Social Influences*

The data from experiments on social influences suggests that when a subject is in a situation in which other people are present, the behavior of those other people is a factor in determining whether the subject will behave in trait-relevant or trait-contrary ways. There are several studies which support the thesis that the presence of others can affect numerous types of trait relevant behavior, among which are studies conducted by Latane and Rodin, Latane and Darley, Darley and Batson, Milgram and Zimbardo. I will now briefly describe the findings of each of these studies.

The studies that Latane conducted with Rodin and Darley, respectively, found that the way in which a subject responds to an apparent medical emergency is at least partially determined by how those who are present with the subject react to the emergency.<sup>42</sup> If those who are present with the subject do not react as if the sound of a loud crash and a woman's scream signal a medical emergency, for example, then the subject is also unlikely to react as if these sounds signal a medical emergency. On the other hand, if those who are present with the subject react as if these sounds do signal a medical emergency, then the subject is likely to respond in the same manner.

Darley and Batson's study found that whether a subject responds to an apparent emergency is at least partially determined by the degree of hurriedness the subject is experiencing.<sup>43</sup> In an experiment conducted at Princeton Theological Seminary, Darley and Batson found that the more hurried a subject was to meet an obligation, the less likely she was to stop and help a confederate who appeared to be in distress. Darley and

Batson's data supported this conclusion even though all the subjects were studying for a compassionate vocation like the ministry, and the obligation, namely being on time to give an oral presentation, would not ordinarily seem as urgent to a compassionate person as helping someone in distress.

The studies that Milgram conducted found that subjects who believed themselves to be taking part in an experiment which studied the effects of punishment on learning were willing to administer dangerous electric shocks to an experimental confederate when they were given commands to do so by a polite but firm experimenter and there was a gradual increase in voltage with each "shock".<sup>44</sup> There have been many permutations of Milgram's experiment over the past five decades, and, although many of the subjects in these studies have shown visible signs of mental distress, on average, two-thirds of them have been willing to administer lethal "shocks" to the confederate.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, Zimbardo's study showed that subjects who had no previous record of anti-social behavior could engage in cruel and sadistic acts when they were asked to take part in an experiment that was designed to replicate the conditions of an American prison.<sup>46</sup> In Zimbardo's prison experiment, those who engaged in cruel and sadistic acts were the 'guards' who had authority over those in the experiment who played the role of 'prisoners'. The psychological torment that some of the 'prisoners' experienced at having to perform such acts as cleaning out toilets with their bare hands was so severe that the experiment had to be terminated prematurely.

### **Section 1.1.1.3 The Situationist's Skeptical Conclusion**

With the exception of Hartshorne and May, the body of experimental data I have just reviewed comes entirely from one off experiments which involve short-term observations of behavior. In Section One of this chapter, however, I stated that Doris and Harman claim that this body of data is nonetheless sufficient to warrant a skeptical conclusion about trans-situational character traits. I will presently state how they argue for this conclusion.

It may seem that one cannot justifiably draw conclusions about a subjects' character from studies which involve short-term observations of behavior for the following reason. Unless a particular subject instantiates a particular character trait perfectly, it would not be surprising to find them occasionally failing to act out of such a trait. Only an ideally courageous agent, for example, is one who could never be found to act cowardly, but one who is imperfectly courageous might occasionally be found to act cowardly.

Given this distinction between perfectly and imperfectly instantiating a given character trait, one may object to Doris and Harman's frequent use of one off studies for the following reason. While observing a subject failing to act out of a character trait one time is sufficient to falsify the claim that such a subject perfectly instantiates a character trait, it is not sufficient to falsify the claim that such a subject imperfectly instantiates a given character trait. In order to falsify the latter claim, one would have to observe the subject over a long period of time.

In reply to this objection, Doris argues that in many of the one off experiments such as the Milgram's Obedience Study, the experimental subjects weren't just observed to act imperfectly, most of the experimental subjects were found to act monstrously. Thus, for Doris, it is difficult to reconcile even these short-term observations with the claim that the subjects' instantiation of character traits like compassion was merely imperfect. Too many subjects in Milgram, Isen and Levin, and Darley and Batson failed to exhibit minimally decent behavior.<sup>47</sup>

I think Doris' claim about what these one off experiments reveal can be better understood given the distinction that Mark Alfano makes between high-fidelity and low-fidelity character traits. According to Alfano, low-fidelity character traits are those traits which would require only a few observations of a subject exhibiting that trait before one could justifiably conclude that the subject has that trait.<sup>48</sup> High-fidelity traits, on the other hand, are those traits which would require many more observations of a subject exhibiting that trait before the conclusion that the subject has that trait becomes justified. Furthermore, just a single observation of a subject failing to exhibit the trait would make the claim that the subject has the trait unjustifiable. Traits such as charity are low-fidelity traits since one does not have to act charitably all the time in order to be charitable. Traits such as compassion, on the other hand, are high-fidelity traits, since a single episode of a subject's acting cruelly is sufficient to disconfirm the claim that the subject is compassionate, while many acts of compassion would be insufficient to confirm the claim that the subject is compassionate.



To see how compassion is a high-fidelity virtue, it should be obvious that if the charges that Lee Harvey Oswald murdered John F. Kennedy and a Dallas police officer are true, then he was not a compassionate person. There are, of course, lots of people that Oswald did not murder whom he could have murdered. Among these are his wife Marina, his two children, his mother Marguerite, his brother Robert, his coworkers at the Texas Schoolbook Depository and so forth. Yet it would be strange to insist that Oswald was compassionate because despite murdering two people, he didn't murder most of the people in his life. In the same manner, it would be strange to say with any confidence that someone is compassionate because they resisted an order to shock an innocent person one time, but it would not be strange to say that they lack compassion even if they only obeyed such an order one time.

Since compassion is a high-fidelity virtue, I think Doris would argue that even single observations of subjects acting cruelly or callously in studies such as Milgram, Darley and Batson, and Isen and Levin are sufficient to warrant the conclusion that such subjects lack compassion, even though such one off experiments would be of limited value when it comes to low-fidelity character traits.

### **Section 1.1.2 Evaluative Integration**

In the introduction of this project, I stated that situationists are skeptical of the claim that “in a given character or personality, the occurrence of a trait with a particular evaluative valence is probabilistically related to the occurrence of other traits with similar evaluative valences.” This thesis, which Doris calls evaluative integration, (hereafter EI) is the claim that whoever instantiates a single virtue is likely to instantiate

them all, and whoever instantiates a single vice is likely to instantiate them all. Different forms of EI are attributed to both Plato and Aristotle. Plato is believed by many to have held the strong thesis that all the virtues are identical and the names for different virtues such as courage, justice and temperance all name the same virtue.<sup>49</sup> Aristotle seems to have held the weaker thesis that while the virtues are not identical, no one can have a single virtue in the strict sense without having them all.<sup>50</sup>

Although Doris and Harman are skeptical of evaluative integration, this component of their skeptical thesis is directed more at empirical claims from Aristotelian virtue ethicists than from dispositionist personality psychologists.<sup>51</sup> Dispositionists have generally not been interested in evaluative integration, and there is far less social psychological data that would support skepticism about this thesis than there is that would support skepticism about trans-situational traits. None the less, it is worth mentioning that there is some experimental data which support skepticism about evaluative integration, among which is Asch's study which shows that subjects are often quite skilled at taking an incongruent pair of traits and organizing them into the impression of a coherent personality. For example, subjects who were provided the word pair "brilliant-foolish" integrated them into an impression of an "absent-minded professor" who is too preoccupied with difficult concepts to pay attention to ordinary tasks.<sup>52</sup> These studies suggest that individuals have a cognitive bias that favors the belief that an individual's behavior is consistent with a coherent personality even when the individual's behavior provides strong evidence of incoherence.

Such studies support skepticism about the evaluative integration of character traits (hereafter EI) because they don't require the skeptic to posit the existence of EI in order to explain the perception of coherent personalities. If the only explanation for why people seem to observe EI is that EI causes these observations, then skepticism about EI is a non-starter. However, if there are two equally good explanations for why people perceive EI in others, one of which does not require positing the existence of EI, then the skeptic of EI has a right to wonder why she should believe in the existence of EI. When studies such as Asch show that a cognitive bias could cause the perception of EI just as easily as EI itself, this cognitive bias becomes the equally good explanation for the perception of EI that the skeptic of EI is looking for in order to wonder why she should believe in the existence of EI.

A cognitive bias would not be an equally good explanation for the perception of EI as EI itself if one had independent reasons for believing in EI apart from the anecdotal evidence that comes from observations. If, for example, there were methodologically sound longitudinal studies which showed that whenever subjects instantiate a character trait with a certain positive or negative valence they tend to instantiate other traits with the same valence, then such studies could provide a good reason to believe in the existence of EI. Given the absence of such studies, however, the skeptic of EI seems justified in wondering why she should accept EI.

In addition to Asch's study, there is other data which supports skepticism about EI, although this data takes the form of biographical and not experimental data. Doris, for

example, uses biographical data about Josef Mengele and Oscar Schindler to argue that positively-valenced character traits can be co-instantiated with negatively-valenced character traits in the same personality, even when such personalities belong to notorious monsters such as Mengele or celebrated heroes such as Schindler. While the former was notorious for his murders in Nazi concentration camps, biographical data indicates that he would also manifest admirable behavior toward the children held in these camps, most of whom were quite fond of Mengele.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, while Schindler famously saved thousands of Jews from murder during the Holocaust, biographical data indicates that he was also a “manipulative, hard drinking and womanizing war profiteer”.<sup>54</sup>

## **Section 1.2 Situationism Applied to Virtue Ethics**

Now that I have restated the situationist case for skepticism about global character traits, in order to complete my reconstruction of situationism, I am turning to the way in which this skepticism affects virtue ethical theories. While Harman seems to believe that situationism creates serious problem for all virtue ethical theories, for his part, Doris is not quite as pessimistic about the entire virtue ethical approach to normative ethics. Doris claims that some moral theories which could be classified as virtue ethical largely withstand the situationist critique since they allow little or no role for global character traits. Among these are Maria Merritt’s and Judith Thomson’s accounts of morality. My reconstruction of both accounts is forthcoming in Chapters Three and Four.<sup>55</sup>

Notwithstanding Doris' views about these two forms of virtue ethics, Doris and Harman's skepticism about global character traits entails that in their view, Aristotelian virtue ethics is untenable for the following reasons. It is uncontroversial that Aristotelian virtues are traits with a positive moral valence, but Doris and Harman both argue that Aristotelian virtues are best understood as global character traits, since in *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle claims that truly virtuous action proceeds from a "firm and unchanging character."<sup>56</sup> In addition, the presence of virtue is supposed to provide "assurance as to what will get done as well as what won't".<sup>57</sup> Finally, virtues are *hexeis*, which entails that they are "permanent and hard to change".<sup>58</sup> For Doris and Harman, these kinds of claims are consistent with the globalist claim that character traits are "long term, stable" traits which are trans-situationally consistent.<sup>59</sup>

As I stated in the first section of this chapter, for Doris and Harman, the experimental data from social psychology supports skepticism about global character traits by showing how powerful situations can affect an individual's ability to act in trait-relevant ways. If this data undermines claims about global character traits and Aristotelian virtues are a subset of global character traits, then it will follow that this data also undermines claims about Aristotelian virtues.

In their critique of Aristotelian virtue ethics, it should be noted that Doris and Harman are willing to grant that Aristotelian virtues are not mere global character traits but intelligent traits which an agent will only instantiate if she has an adequate sensitivity to what is appropriate in each circumstance.<sup>60</sup> Aristotle explains that one can

have a “natural virtue” by acting in a way that is consistent but not in a way that is appropriately consistent.<sup>61</sup> One could be ‘naturally’ fearless by acting in a fearless way for the wrong cause, as a fearless Nazi would, for example, or in the wrong way, as a daredevil would who risks bodily injury for trivial reasons. However, such fearlessness would not be the virtue of courage. It thus seems that one could be naturally virtuous and have a global character trait, but such a trait would not be a virtue in the strict sense unless the one who has these traits has *phronesis* or the “practical wisdom” to know when, how and for what reason it is appropriate to act in a trait-relevant way.<sup>62</sup> But for Doris and Harman, the data from social psychology doesn’t simply undermine claims about global character traits, this data also undermines claims about Aristotelian virtues in a second way by supporting skepticism about *phronesis*.

Powerful situations such as those in Milgram’s experiment support skepticism about *phronesis*, Doris and Harman argue, since it is clear that an overwhelming number of subjects in this experiment not only behaved badly, but deliberated badly. This experiment in which an experimenter instructed subjects who made a commitment to be a part of the experiment to shock an innocent confederate presented a conflict between two moral obligations, namely, the obligation to do one’s part to contribute to scientific research, and an obligation not to harm an innocent person.<sup>63</sup> It seems that a practically wise person would easily recognize that whatever reason she may have had to contribute to science was overridden by her reason not to harm an innocent person, but few of the subjects recognized what the practically wise agent would recognize. Moreover, it seems clear that the subjects in this experiment didn’t just act but

deliberated. Many of them even displayed telling signs of deeply conflicted deliberation as they “displayed great emotional strain”.<sup>64</sup> But their actions in shocking the confederate suggest that their deliberation failed to result in appropriate moral action, and this powerful situation not only affected their overt behavior but their cognitive processes as well.

Doris and Harman claim that since social psychology shows that theories which posit the existence of global character traits are empirically inadequate, then Aristotelian virtue ethics faces a serious problem. The most obvious problem for this theory would arise if ‘ought’ implies ‘can’ and global character traits cannot be adequately instantiated.<sup>65</sup> If ‘ought’ implies ‘can’, then it follows that such theories are committed to claiming that something ought to be done which clearly ought not be done.<sup>66</sup>

Doris and Harman are willing to grant that it may be possible to adequately instantiate global character traits, however. Accordingly, they do not claim that it is necessarily the case that global character traits cannot be so instantiated, they only claim that there is insufficient evidence for the claim that they can be so instantiated. But even if adequately instantiating the virtues is extremely difficult and something that few people ever achieve, Doris argues that situationism still raises serious problems for these virtue-ethical theories. One such problem is that these theories can no longer claim to withstand an objection that other moral theories face, namely, that their moral prescriptions alienate agents from her personal projects and commitments by requiring

“theoretical meditation”.<sup>67</sup> Doris thinks that if most agents are not virtuous and yet Aristotelian virtue ethics requires them to instantiate the virtues to a sufficient degree, then it will require them to constantly think about what the ideal virtuous agent would do in every situation. But then virtue ethics would face the same alienation problem that these other theories face. Such a requirement would seem to interfere with the pursuit of projects and commitments that most agents have and which make their lives worth living.

In addition to this alienation problem, Doris claims that an additional worry for Aristotelian virtue theory comes in providing the non-virtuous agent with adequate guidance in moral deliberation. If a non-virtuous agent lacks the virtuous agent’s *phronesis* to know how to deliberate in each situation, then she must either imitate a virtuous exemplar or take advice from a virtuous exemplar.<sup>68</sup> According to Doris, however, there is an obvious difficulty with both of these ideas. What a virtuous exemplar is able to do in a given situation with her set of motives and desires may not be what an ordinary agent would do, and therefore any effort to imitate the exemplar must not only take into account what the virtuous exemplar would do in the ordinary agent’s situation, but also what the ordinary agent is capable of doing with her own set of motives and desires. If, for example, Bob decides that a virtuous agent would freely have dinner in the home of an attractive coworker, this does not entail that Bob should have dinner in the home of this attractive co-worker since the ideally virtuous agent may not be vulnerable to sexual temptation but Bob may be.



A similar objection can be raised against the advice model of action guidance. Since the non-virtuous moral agent may not have the same motives and desires as the virtuous exemplar, it is not sufficient for the virtuous exemplar to tell the non-virtuous agent what she should do in a given situation, the exemplar must know what the non-virtuous agent is capable of doing given her set of motives and desires. The virtuous exemplar may be practically wise enough to know what is the overall virtuous thing to do in each situation, but unless her practical wisdom also includes a grasp of the motives and desires of ordinary agents, it seems that her advice to the non-virtuous agent will not provide adequate moral guidance.

## **Conclusion**

I will now summarize my reconstruction of the arguments for situationism. I began this chapter by reconstructing the situationist's argument for skepticism about global character traits. The argument, as I stated, is that there is both an insufficient amount of empirical evidence for the existence of global character traits and a sufficient amount of evidence for the non-existence of such traits. As a part of this reconstruction, I both stated why according to situationists, anecdotal and psychometric evidence is insufficient evidence for the existence of global character traits and why mostly one off social psychological experiments provide sufficient empirical evidence for their non-existence.

I then turned to the task of restating what situationists argue are the consequences of their skeptical thesis for virtue ethics. I stated that while Doris and Harman do not

agree about the consequences of their thesis for the entire virtue ethical tradition, they agree that at a minimum, situationism poses a serious problem for Aristotelian virtue ethics. Accordingly, I stated that because Doris and Harman claim that theories about global character traits are empirically inadequate and Aristotelian virtue ethics are a subset of global character traits, it follows that Aristotelian virtue ethics is empirically inadequate. I finally restated Doris and Harman's reasons for claiming that Aristotelian virtue ethics is untenable, even if it can be granted that some agents can either adequately or perfectly instantiate Aristotelian virtues.

## **Chapter 2 Defending an Account of Virtue Ethics**

### **Introduction**

In the last chapter, I reconstructed the Doris and Harman's argument for why situationism poses a serious objection to virtue ethics. Beginning with this chapter, I now turn to the task of defending virtue ethics from this challenge.

In this chapter, I begin this defense by arguing that at least some versions of virtue ethics are worth defending. This is a crucial step in my defense for the following reason. A defense of virtue ethics against situationism will not be philosophically interesting if there are already sufficient reasons for believing that virtue ethics is an untenable approach to normative ethics, or if there are no compelling reasons for being a virtue ethicist rather than a deontologist or consequentialist.

I claim that virtue ethics is philosophically interesting when it is concerned with the question of how human moral agents can be good members of the human species. In claiming that such a question is philosophically interesting, I do not deny that it is conceivable that a moral agent might not be a member of the human species. Moreover, since such agents could be conceivable, neither do I deny that such agents could have moral obligations which do not apply to human moral agents. But while the scope of morality may not be limited to human agents, I claim that normative ethical

theories should still be concerned with the question of what it means to be a good human being, and in this chapter I develop a form of virtue ethics that is focused on addressing this specific question.

While I claim that a concern with answering this question gives us a compelling reason to find virtue ethics to be worth defending, I do not claim that every normative ethical theory is untenable if it is not concerned with answering this question. Rather, I only claim such a theory is untenable if its moral prescriptions are incompatible with the moral prescriptions which follow from the account of virtue ethics I provide in this chapter.

I am proceeding as follows. In the first section, I am providing my account of virtue ethics. The components of this account include an account of the relationship between virtue and flourishing and their definitions, and an account of the relationship between practical wisdom, virtue and right action. In the second section, I turn to the project of explaining how my theory is more convincing than theories with which it is incompatible.

## **Section 2.1 My Account of Virtue Ethics**

### **Section 2.1.1 Virtue, Flourishing and Their Relationship**

I am provisionally defining the virtues as a subset of character traits which are necessary for humans to flourish qua humans. In a forthcoming argument in Chapter Four, I will provide my reasons for claiming that the kinds of character traits that are

virtues are ordinary habits and not global personality traits. For my present purposes in this sub-section, however, I will develop my definition of virtue by first giving an account of human flourishing, then stating why the virtues are necessary but not sufficient for human flourishing. I will complete my account by giving examples of two habits which I provisionally claim are virtues according to my definition. Finally, I will end this section by considering two objections to my account. These objections concern the reasons one has to care about their own flourishing and whether virtue is necessary for my account.

### **Section 2.1.2 An Account of Human Flourishing**

Since I define virtues as the sub-set of character traits which are constitutive of the flourishing of human agents, it is necessary to give an account of flourishing.

Undoubtedly, however, there could be many definitions of flourishing, the constituents of which could be sets of incompatible virtues. In what follows, I am therefore arguing for a particular account of flourishing. This account is one which I claim is acceptable from the moral point of view given the method of reflective equilibrium.<sup>69</sup>

Those who value the institution of morality will undoubtedly have a number of conflicting points of view about controversial moral issues and will justify their moral beliefs according to distinct and conflicting moral theories. But as I am defining it, the moral point of view is a thin enough conception that it can be shared by those who disagree along such lines. Thus, those who share the moral point of view may disagree about such matters as which moral theory best explains commonly held moral intuitions or on controversial moral issues such as the permissibility of abortion. Nonetheless, they

share certain minimal moral commitments. Among these commitments are the belief that the suffering of innocent sentient beings is prima facie bad and that it is prima facie wrong to deceive an innocent person.<sup>70</sup>

Using the method of reflective equilibrium to adopt a moral theory will require the revision of one's moral beliefs if those beliefs are incompatible with the most convincing moral theory, but the method can also require revising such a moral theory if such a theory is unacceptable given one's moral beliefs. Given that the moral beliefs I am using with this method are those I define as the moral point of view, certain conceptions of flourishing will be unacceptable for my theory even though they may be acceptable definitions from a value neutral perspective. For example, from a value neutral perspective it might be acceptable to define a flourishing human life as one in which enormous wealth and coercive power at one's disposal. However, it seems likely that the kind of character traits which would contribute to this kind of life would be unrecognizable as virtues from the moral point of view. While it may be an empirical question as to what kinds of habits contribute to such a life to a greater degree than others, it seems highly probable that habits such as cruelty and ruthlessness contribute to such a life to a greater degree than habits such as compassion and mercy.

While certain conceptions of flourishing will be unacceptable using this method, however, it should also be clear that the method of reflective equilibrium precludes simply defining a flourishing life as one in which a set of habits are fully instantiated given that those character traits are recognizable as virtues from the moral point of

view. The reason for this is because if the conception of flourishing so defined might be unrecognizable as a coherent conception of flourishing. Moreover, if in using the method of reflective equilibrium, one finds that one's moral beliefs preclude the adoption of a coherent moral theory, the revision of one's moral beliefs is required by this method. What is therefore required by the method of reflective equilibrium is for me to provide an account of flourishing that is both acceptable from the moral point of view and coherent as a conception of flourishing.

In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle defines *eudaimonia*, or human flourishing according to the human *ergon*, so that *eudaimonia* is a state in which the human *ergon* is in an excellent condition.<sup>71</sup> One natural way of translating *ergon* is as a *function*, but to claim that humans have a function in the way that artifacts like can openers and cameras have functions seems to create more problems than it solves. However implausible it may seem to claim that character traits such as cruelty and dishonesty are virtues, it may seem even more implausible to claim that humans have functions. Since the claim that humans have functions may seem to be a non-starter, some Aristotle commentators such as Anthony Kenny even argue that it is better to translate *ergon* as 'characteristic activity' than as 'function'.<sup>72</sup>

I grant that Kenny's view about how best to translate *ergon* may be correct, but deciding between these two options is not critical to my account. I will continue to refer to my account of *eudaimonia* as one of human functioning, although my account could perhaps be better described as an account of characteristic human activity.

On my account of human functioning, a human being that functions well is a good human being. To describe someone as 'a good x' may sometimes be a way of describing them as an object that instantiates the property of goodness. At least some of the time, however, when someone or something is so described, 'good' is being used as an attributive adjective.<sup>73</sup> As P. Geach explains in distinguishing predicative from attributive adjectives, an adjective such as 'large' is attributive rather than predicative, since saying that 'x is a large dog' is not logically equivalent to the conjunction of 'x is large' and 'x is a dog'. On the other hand, 'brown' is a predicative adjective because a statement of the form 'x is a brown dog' is logically equivalent to 'x is brown' and 'x is a dog'.

Given this distinction between predicative and attributive adjectives, it is clear that at least some of the time, 'good' is used as an attributive rather than a predicative adjective. A good car is obviously not good in the same way that a good knife is good, and thus it does not seem that good cars and good knives instantiate the same property of *goodness*. A car is good if it functions reliably in transporting passengers from one location to another, and a knife is good if it is sharp enough to cut and slice, it does not bend and break easily and otherwise functions as a knife should.

As one considers the distinction between predicative and attributive uses of adjectives, it is obvious that one can refer to the 'goodness' of artifacts using the attributive form of 'good' since artifacts have clear functions. What is needed for my project, however, is a credible account of how living biological species such as human beings can have functions and how evaluations of them as good and bad members of



their species can be shown to be an evaluation of how well they carry out these functions.

Aristotle's method of finding the function for human beings is to search for the distinctive activity of human beings. Accordingly, Aristotle claims that the function for humans cannot be nutrition and development because this is common to both plants and animals, nor can it be perception, since animals other than humans share in perception.<sup>74</sup> What humans have which all other species lack, however, is rationality, and therefore this is the human function.

While my account is Aristotelian in the broad sense that it also includes an attempt to find the function of humans and it includes the claim that humans are flourishing if they are functioning well, I think we have good reasons to reject Aristotle's method of finding the function of humans. One serious objection to his method of finding what is distinctive of each species is that it seems to make human functioning depend on facts about non-human species when these should not be the kinds of facts which determine what human functioning consists in.<sup>75</sup> Thus, if it should turn out that another species of rational beings were discovered on another planet at some future date, then according to Aristotle's method, rationality could no longer be considered the function of humans, since this would no longer be the distinctive activity of human beings. But it would be strange to think that whatever the function of human beings is, it should turn out to be dependent on facts about non-humans.

In light of this problem with Aristotle's method, it seems it would be wise to turn to the recent work of naturalist virtue ethicists who have provided two additional ways of determining the function of a particular living thing or "life form".<sup>76</sup> On one hand, it is possible to use Michael Thompson's approach of claiming that a life form is good or functions well whenever it does what other such life forms characteristically do.<sup>77</sup> According to this account, if a life form  $f$  does what other  $f$ s characteristically do, it is a good  $f$  and if it fails to do what other  $f$ s characteristically do, it is defective in some way. A different account of functioning has been put forth by Philippa Foot and Rosalind Hursthouse, according to which a life form is good or functioning well when it does what a life form characteristically does to promote certain ends.<sup>78</sup> At a minimum, these ends (hereafter 'the three ends') are the survival of the species and reproduction, but for life forms which have a capacity for social interaction, these ends will also include the good functioning of the social group.

I claim that the Foot/Hursthouse kind of account (hereafter "the teleological account") is more convincing than Thompson's view, and I will defend a version of this view for the following reason. Let us suppose that a life form has a feature that is uncharacteristic for its species but which better promotes the ends of reproduction and the survival of the species. Suppose, for example, that through a genetic mutation, a box turtle developed a shell which is both harder and lighter than every other shell found among box turtles (hereafter a "shell\*"). Shells\* would better protect the turtle than common box turtle shells since their weight would not slow the turtle down as it attempts to escape from predators and they would be harder than such common shells.

By Thompson's lights, however, shells\* would be defective merely because they are uncharacteristic shells for the box turtle. Surely this is an odd view. On the view that I am defending, I will grant that having a shell\* would not make a turtle a good turtle, since such shells do not allow box turtles to promote ends like survival in a way that is characteristic of box turtles. However, it does not follow that such a turtle is defective. Such a turtle would have to be defective, however, if all that matters about turtles is that all of its features are characteristic of box turtles.<sup>79</sup>

Since on the Foot/Hursthouse account of functioning, any life form functions well if it promotes certain ends in a way that is characteristic of the life form, it follows that as a life form, humans function well when they promote these same ends in a way that is characteristic of their human life form. There are obviously clear distinctions between the human life form and other life forms, however, and these distinctions will entail that humans may not directly contribute to the three ends in a way that a good honeybee or a good dandelion contributes to such ends. Because humans, unlike box turtles and peacocks, are intelligent life forms, it is characteristic of human beings to be aware of their own mortality and aware that they can choose not to live at all should they no longer find life worth living. These unique facts about the human life form entail that one way of promoting human survival is to try and make life enjoyable for other human beings. Thus, a good human being may have a virtue such as compassion which does not directly promote the survival of the human species, but a compassionate person indirectly contributes to the survival of the human species by easing human suffering and making human life worth living.

Moreover, if it is true that the project of making life worth living promotes the end of human survival, then at times the project of promoting human survival may conflict with the project of promoting other ends of the human life form such as reproduction. Although a good human being would not be committed to the extinction of the human species, it may be the case that the world can become so overpopulated that life is no longer worth living. Therefore, it should not be surprising that a good human being could be one who is committed to projects such as population control. Such a commitment, however, does not provide a counterexample to the claim that a good human being promotes the same kinds of ends of reproduction and survival that any other good life form promotes.

I can now provide a more complete definition of virtue. I have defined the virtues as those character traits which are constitutive of eudaimonia or flourishing for members of the human species. Moreover, I have argued that a member of a particular species was a good/flourishing as a member of the species if and only if it promotes the three ends in a way that is characteristic of its species. In light of this argument, I can now claim that a virtue is a character trait which characteristically promotes the three ends for a member of the human species.

Given the diversity of occupations, cultural roles, hobbies and lifestyles one finds in the human population, it would be odd to claim that there are only a few characteristic ways in which an individual can promote the three ends. One can find humans promoting the end of the survival of the species in countless ways such as researching

diseases, growing food on farms, engineering machines and automobiles with safety features, and nursing the sick, just to name a few. Surely among the countless ways in which the three ends can be promoted it would be arbitrary to pick out just a few of these ways and call them the “characteristic” ways in which the three ends are promoted. In providing my definition of virtue, however, I do not claim that there are only a few characteristic ways in which humans may promote the three ends. Rather, I claim that among the complete set of character traits, only some of these traits are characteristically used to promote the three ends. Thus, while it may be possible to imagine that there could be some scenario in which cruelty and callousness could be used to promote the three ends, I think that such a scenario would be unusual. Those character traits which characteristically promote the three ends, it seems, are traits such as compassion, generosity, honesty, and so forth.

### **Section 2.1.3 Why the Virtues are Necessary but Not Sufficient for Human Flourishing**

In my definition of virtue, I claimed that the virtues were necessary but not sufficient for human flourishing. My reasons for this are as follows. For most every life form on my account, it would be strange for that life form to function well and promote the three ends apart from having functioning physical parts. An oak tree that lacked strong, water absorbing roots and could neither perform photosynthesis or produces acorns would obviously be defective as it could not promote the ends of reproduction and survival in a characteristic way for oak trees. Since humans characteristically have rational wills they are more than the sum of their physical parts. However, a human life

form which was sterile and lacked three of the five senses would seem to be defective in certain ways, even though she might have a good rational will.

On my account, the virtues are components of a good rational will for the human life form and a good rational will is necessary for the good functioning of a human life form. However, since humans, like all life forms, also have characteristic ways of promoting the three ends apart from the exercise of their rational wills, humans can fail to function well even if they have good rational wills. For these reasons, the virtues are necessary but not sufficient for a good functioning and therefore flourishing life for humans.

My claim that the virtues are necessary for flourishing, however, will be implausible if more than a handful of character traits are virtues. It would be hard to imagine that a single agent could instantiate courage, compassion, hope, honesty, fidelity, generosity, integrity, industry, modesty, moderation, magnificence, patience, persistence, justice, beneficence, loyalty, chastity, and humility, for example, if all of these are virtues. Furthermore, since for an agent to instantiate some character traits would seem to preclude the possibility of her instantiating other character traits, it seems that my account would end up with the consequence that it is impossible for any agent to be a flourishing agent.<sup>80</sup>

In order to address this concern, I claim that the virtues are necessary for flourishing in a weak sense rather than a strong sense. I do not claim that it is necessary for an agent to instantiate every single virtue in order to flourish. Rather, I claim that it is

only necessary that an agent instantiate a sufficient number of virtues to a sufficient degree for her to be virtuous in order for her to flourish.

Making this weak claim about the necessity of virtues, however, will raise the following problem. The concept of virtue and the concepts that are associated with particular virtues such as *courageous*, *compassionate*, or *generous* all seem to be vague concepts like *bald* or *heap*.<sup>81</sup> Vague concepts do not admit of such precise thresholds that would allow us to state precisely to what degree one must have them in order to have them. It seems clear that someone who acts virtuously in 75 percent of situations which call for virtue is more virtuous than someone who acts virtuously in only 50 percent of such situations. Moreover, someone who instantiates five virtues is more virtuous than someone who instantiates only three. But since virtue is a vague concept, it seems that using a precise threshold to separate the virtuous from the non-virtuous will be arbitrary.

Fortunately, however, I think we have good reason to doubt that my account requires such precise thresholds for two reasons. The first reason for this is because just as virtue and the aforementioned concepts that are associated with virtues are vague concepts, flourishing also seems to be a vague concept. A young, healthy and strong stallion is flourishing more than an old and weak but otherwise healthy stallion, but the latter is flourishing more than an old and weak stallion with broken legs. Nonetheless, it does not seem possible to state with any precision what would distinguish a stallion that is flourishing from one that is not. In light of this shared vagueness among the concepts

of virtue and flourishing, I claim that an agent is flourishing to the precise degree that she is more virtuous than vicious.<sup>82</sup>

The second reason to doubt that my account requires such precise thresholds is as follows. Even though flourishing and virtuous are vague concepts, it still seems possible to describe a human agent as flourishing or virtuous without making any reference to the degree to which they are either flourishing or virtuous. While concepts such as *tall*, and *bald* are vague concepts, it is still possible to describe someone as tall or bald *tout court*. In the same manner, even given my account in which virtue and flourishing are instantiated on a scale, it is still possible to describe an agent as virtuous or flourishing *tout court*.

Despite the fact that an agent need not instantiate every one of the virtues perfectly or even at all in order to be virtuous and flourishing, for particular human agents, some of the virtues will be more critical to instantiate for these purposes than others. In adopting the teleological view of flourishing, I have argued that in order to flourish, a member of a species must promote the two ends of reproduction and survival, and possibly the third end of the good social functioning of its group. In nature, however, it is quite common to find members of a given species promoting these three ends through different roles. I have claimed that for a member of a species to flourish, it must contribute to these three ends in a manner that is characteristic of its species. But this need not entail that every member of a species has a single characteristic way of promoting these three ends. Moreover, if there need not be a single way in which a



member of a species characteristically promotes these three ends, then there is no reason to suppose that there is a single way in which a human rational will contribute to these three ends.

Within various plant and animal species, there are clear ways in which members of a single species can characteristically promote these three ends in diverse roles. One of the most obvious places in which different roles for promoting these ends can be found is among species in which reproduction happens sexually rather than asexually. I have argued that whether a member of a given species is flourishing will be determined at least in part by how well they function in their characteristic role of reproduction. But it is obvious that male and female members of any given biological species will have different roles in contributing to reproduction among species which reproduce sexually. Moreover, sexual differentiation is not the only example of a way in which one can find a diversity of roles in promoting the three ends in a given species. In a hive of honeybees, one can find that the adult male honeybees have different roles in contributing to the three ends as they worker bees engage in activities such as constructing the hive and protecting the colony with their stingers while the drones mate with the queen.<sup>83</sup>

In light of the frequency with which one can find diverse roles within a single species in characteristically promoting the three ends, it should be no surprise that within the human species, human life forms can also adopt different characteristic roles in promoting the three ends. Human life forms adopt different roles in promoting these

three ends both due to natural circumstances such as their different genders, but also due to the social commitments they accept by virtue of such matters as their chosen occupations, their choice of raising children and so forth. Given these different roles, whether or not a human life form is flourishing ought not to be determined by whether or not they have the entire set of virtues, but whether or not they have the set of virtues that would allow them to promote the three ends in a characteristic way for their roles. Just as drone honeybees do not need stingers in order to promote the three ends of a honeybee hive, illusionists and actors do not need to be honest in the way that journalists do. Parents of young children need patience in the face of frequent failures in intellectual, social and physical development. Physicians, nurses, and children of adults reaching the end of life need compassion and hope in the face of suffering.

Given these various roles in promoting the three ends that one finds among human life forms, it should be clear that there is more than one way that human life forms might promote the three ends and thus more than one way in which human life forms can flourish. With such a diversity of roles, there is therefore no need to worry that my account saddled with the implausible thesis that every virtue is equally important for each human agent for the sake of being virtuous and flourishing. Moreover, there is also no need to worry that on my account, human agents must instantiate an inconsistent set of virtues in order to flourish. Virtues which may be good for humans with one set of social roles may be bad for humans with different social roles, but given that a single human agent cannot play every single role found among humans in promoting the three

ends, there is no reason to believe that they must instantiate an inconsistent set of virtues.<sup>84</sup>

#### **Section 2.1.4 Possible Examples of Specific Virtues**

Since dozens of character traits could promote one or more of these three ends in a way that is characteristic of the human life form, it follows that dozens of character traits could be virtues according to my definition. Moreover, even if only a few character traits qualify as members of the set of virtues in accordance with my definition, stating why the set of virtues should be limited to these few character traits would require providing reasons for why other potential members of this set do not promote one or more of these three ends. Carrying out such a project would surely require at least a single book, and I will not attempt such a project here.

In order to make my account plausible, however, it seems necessary to illustrate how certain character traits might be members of the set of virtues as I have defined it by providing examples of particular virtues. I am therefore provisionally claiming that compassion and courage are virtues. I claim that these character traits are virtues only provisionally not because I have any doubts that they promote one or more of the three ends of functioning life forms. Rather, I claim that they are virtues only provisionally because providing a complete justification for their status as virtues would require providing reasons for why these character traits are not either identical to other traits with different names, or are specific forms of more general character traits.

Compassion promotes the three ends for humans in many ways, but let us simply consider some of the ways in which compassion promotes the survival of the human species. Certainly scientists whose research furthers medical knowledge, and both physicians and nurses who practice medicine all need compassion to prolong life. Nevertheless, even those whose exercise of compassion does not directly prolong life indirectly promote it through making life worth living. Both medical research and the practice of medicine can also be used to ease physical suffering even when physical suffering is not directly life threatening but makes life unbearable. Therefore, those in such professions will also need compassion for those whose lives are not in danger but who could choose not to live. Moreover, since not only physical but emotional suffering can make life unbearable, compassion for people such as those who are lonely often motivates humans to form relationships with those who need companionship.

In addition to compassion, courage seems to be a virtue because while it may promote each of the three ends, it clearly promotes the end of human reproduction in the following ways. Human reproduction characteristically begins with courtship between members of the opposite sex, and the act of courtship requires courage since rejection from a potential romantic partner can be psychologically painful. In societies with arranged marriages, courtship between romantic partners may require less courage, but it will require courage for the parents who are arranging the marriage and who care about the quality of the relationship which their children may have for a lifetime. After courtship, parenthood also requires at least a modicum of courage, since children can suffer and die. Moreover, even if they grow up physically healthy, when

children grow up and gain autonomy they can cause their parents pain because of their autonomy since they may use their autonomy to reject a relationship with their parents. Without courage, humans may not promote reproduction because reproduction typically exposes potential parents to the risk of severe emotional pain.

#### **Section 2.1.5 Objections to My Account**

I will now consider both of the objections to my account which I stated that I would consider in the introduction to this section. These objections concern the reasons human agents have to care about their own flourishing and whether virtues are necessary for my account. I now consider these objections in turn.

##### *Reasons for Caring About Eudaimonia*

The first objection to my account is a common objection to eudaemonist forms of virtue ethics. This is the objection that by defining virtues as character traits which are constitutive of flourishing, such theories give human agents the wrong kinds of reasons for acting morally. According to this objection, because eudaemonist forms of virtue ethics claim that agents should pursue their own flourishing, such theories claim that agents should be moral for their own sake. Not everyone will find such claims objectionable; ethical egoists also claim that agents should be moral for their own sake. According to the present objection, however, anyone who finds ethical egoism objectionable should find eudaemonist forms of virtue ethics objectionable.<sup>85</sup>

If there can be no convincing rejoinder to this “wrong reasons” objection, then this objection poses a serious problem to my account for two reasons. If this objection is correct, then not only would my account seem to claim that those who are motivated to act morally out of self-interested reasons are acting with virtuous motives, but it would even seem to claim that those who are motivated to act morally for altruistic reasons have vicious motives. What they ought to be concerned with is their own flourishing. I will address these concerns in turn.

In reply to the egoism objection, if my account of virtue ethics is an attempt to convince human agents to be moral for selfish reasons, it is an obvious failure. While I claim that eudaemonia/flourishing benefits the individual human agent, I think that few people who are motivated by selfishness would be interested in pursuing eudaemonia/flourishing as I have described it. Admittedly, selfish agents would likely find something appealing about character traits which promote at least two of the three ends of the survival of the human species and the good functioning of the social group. It is likely, however, that these character traits will appeal to them only as traits that other people should have, not as traits that they should have. It is appealing to self-interested humans that as many people as possible will have putative virtues such as honesty, compassion, and courage. Even selfish people generally do not like being cheated, they like being cared for when they are sick, and they like being protected from those who would harm the community, just to name a few benefits of such putative virtues. What they will not be, however, is motivated to pursue these virtues for themselves.

If self-interested persons do not care and cannot be persuaded to care about their own flourishing, however, this will raise the further objection that they have no good reason to care about their own flourishing if reasons internalism is true. If reasons internalism is true, then an agent will only have a good reason to  $\phi$  only if she can be motivated to  $\phi$ .<sup>86</sup> However, I am not convinced that I should grant that reasons internalism is true.

While reasons internalism might be true, I think there are compelling reasons to doubt its truth, one of which is the following. Reasons internalism would seem to entail that a sociopathic agent who could never be persuaded to care about the suffering of innocent sentient beings who are the victims of torture have no good reason to care about such beings.<sup>87</sup> Since this claim about good reasons seems highly counterintuitive, I think it is likely that reasons internalism is false.

I now come to the other objection to my account, which is that according to my account, there is something wrong with an agent who cares about being virtuous but who does not care about flourishing. According to this objection, since my account appeals to agents to pursue their own flourishing out of self-interested reasons, if someone is too altruistic to be persuaded by this appeal then there is something wrong with her. However, this seems absurd, because an altruistic agent could be motivated to care about virtue for its own sake and not for the ways that virtue benefits her.

By way of replying to this objection, I concede that my account would be objectionable if I claimed that all agents have a good reason to care about their

flourishing and I made this claim as a *de dicto* claim. However, I do not make this claim as a *de dicto* claim, but only as a *de re* claim.

To better understand what I mean by a *de re* rather than a *de dicto* claim, it will help to consider the following propositions.

(4) Necessarily, among of the things that human agents have good reasons to care about, one of them is her flourishing.

(5) Among the things that human agents have good reasons to care about, one of them is necessarily her flourishing.

While (4) or (5) make similar claims, I am only committed to the truth of (5) and I am thus willing to grant that (4) might be false. The crucial difference between (4) and (5) is that in (5), the claim that human agents have a good reason to care about their flourishing is a *de re* claim, and it is a *de dicto* claim in (4). In (5) in other words, ‘flourishing’ is substitutable with other terms which are identical to ‘flourishing’ and it is not in (4). Thus, while both (4) and (5) claim that in some way human agents necessarily have a good reason to care about flourishing, the truth of (5) allows for the following possibility. An agent could be motivated to care about a state which is identical to flourishing, even though she does not call such a state a state of flourishing and may not even know that it is identical to the state of flourishing. In such a case, what the agent might be able to be motivated about is the state of being virtuous, being a good person, or having a complete sub-set of those traits which would make her a good or virtuous person on my account.



If it is unclear how it might be possible that an agent can unknowingly care about her flourishing because she cares about a state which is identical to her flourishing, it might be helpful to consider the following example. Because Superman is identical to Clark Kent, if Lois Lane loves Superman then she loves Clark Kent, even if she does not know that she loves Clark Kent. In the same manner, if an agent cares about a state that is identical to flourishing, then she cares about her flourishing, even though she does not know she cares about her flourishing.

What follows from interpreting my commitment to the claim that every agent has a good reason to care about her own flourishing as a *de re* claim only is this. On my account, if an altruistic agent cares about being virtuous, being a good person, or some other state which would appeal to her as an altruistic person, then she does care about her own flourishing because on my account such states are identical to the state of flourishing. Therefore, the fact that an altruistic agent may not care about her own flourishing when it is described as such poses no problem for my account.

### *The Virtues Are Not Necessary for My Account*

Another objection to my account is as follows. Although humans can promote the three ends of their species through putative virtues such as courage and compassion, it seems certain that humans can also promote these ends apart from the virtues. This will at least be the case if virtues are to be defined as traits which bear much of a resemblance to Aristotelian *arête*. Aristotle claimed that an agent with *arête* performs virtuous actions “for their own sake.”<sup>88</sup> However, it is reasonable to imagine that

humans can promote the three ends without acting for the sake of virtuous ends just as well as they could by acting for the sake of non-virtuous ends. One could act courageously because one is afraid of having a reputation of being a coward rather than acting courageously for its own sake. It seems that by acting in such a manner, one could promote the three ends for humans just as well as one could by doing courageous acts for the sake of courageous ends.

I accept the Aristotelian claim that in order to instantiate a virtue an agent must act for the sake of such a virtue. Nonetheless, I also accept that it may be possible to promote the three ends for the human species apart from instantiating any virtue. I will now explain how it is possible to make both claims in light of the naturalist account of virtues that I am providing in this chapter.

According to my account, a human life form, like any life form, is in a good condition not if it simply promotes the three ends, but if it promotes the three ends in a manner that is characteristic for its life form. Thus, while on the view of naturalist virtue ethics that I accept, while being a characteristic feature of a species is not sufficient for such a feature to be a good-making-feature for the life form, it is necessary for such a feature to be a good-making-feature. Thus, while a box turtle may promote the three ends for box turtles by having a shell\*, shells\* are not good-making-features for box turtles, since it is not characteristic for box turtles to have shells\*. I have granted that it might be good *for* a box turtle to have shells\*. However, shells\* do not make a box turtle a good box turtle since shells\* are not normative for box turtles. They are not

normative because while they might promote the three ends for box turtles, having a shell\* is not the characteristic way in which a box turtle promotes the three ends. Thus, while someone might say that a box turtle “ought” to have a hard shell, or a box turtle is defective for lacking a hard shell, it would be unusual for anyone to say that a box turtle “ought” to have a shell\*.<sup>89</sup>

Just as shells\* are not normative for box turtles, I claim that a character trait which would make human agents act out of fear of having a bad reputation is not normative for human agents. Such character traits could promote the three ends for humans, but they would not promote them in a way that humans characteristically promote the three ends. Thus, a character trait which causes humans to act courageously out of fear of having a reputation for cowardice might promote reproduction for the human species just as well as I have claimed the putative virtue of courage promotes it. But such a character trait would not allow humans to promote this end in a way that is characteristic for human life forms to promote this end.

#### **Section 2.1.6 My Account of Right Action**

In this sub-section, I provide my definition of right action and I give an account of how both virtue and practical wisdom work together to cause a virtuous person to act rightly. I also consider two objections to my account, but I argue that neither of these objections is convincing.

I define an action as right if it is a virtuous action and a virtuous action as an action which an agent would perform if they had the motive to achieving a virtuous end and

they knew the means to achieving that end. In Section 2.1.2 of this chapter, I defined virtues as character traits which characteristically promote the three ends of a flourishing member of the human species. At minimum, I claimed these ends are the survival of the species, reproduction and the good functioning of the social group. However, the ends for which the virtues exist should not be confused with the virtuous ends of action. I have provided the three ends of a functioning member of a species in order to answer the question “Why are certain character traits virtues?” In this section, however, I am concerned with the question of what makes certain acts right acts.

If this distinction is unclear, it might be helpful to consider the difference between the justification of moral principles and the justification of token acts within a moral theory such as Kant’s. If a Kantian were to ask herself what justifies her belief that it is wrong to make a promise she does not intend to keep, she would consider the categorical imperative, one formula of which states that she should only act on a maxim “through which she could at the same time will that it become a universal law.”<sup>90</sup> If she accepts Kant’s reasons for why the maxim in question is one which she cannot will to be a universal law, then she will decide that her belief that such promises is wrong is justified. Suppose, however, that she is deciding whether a certain token promise is one she should not make. She can again consult the categorical imperative again to decide whether it would be wrong to make such a promise. But she need not do so. Since she has already used the categorical imperative to decide that it would be wrong to make promises that she does not intend to keep, all she needs to decide now is whether this particular promise is one she intends to keep or not. If she decides that it is such a

promise, she will decide that it is morally permissible to make it, and if she decides that it is not such a promise, she will decide that it is wrong to make such a promise. Thus, a Kantian will use the categorical imperative to justify principles which forbid violating certain principles, but once someone uses the categorical imperative to decide that certain principles should not be violated, it will not be necessary to use the categorical imperative again every time a Kantian deliberates about how to act. All she will need to deliberate about is whether her actions violate the principle which she has already decided is justified.

Just as token acts can be justified for a Kantian agent in a different manner from the way that moral principles are justified, I claim that the virtues are justified in a different manner than token acts are justified. On my view, a particular act will be justified and thus right if it is an act performed for a virtuous end, (a compassionate end, a courageous end, and so forth). The virtues themselves are justified, however, because for they promote the three ends of a flourishing for humans.

Having a particular moral virtue will cause an agent to be disposed to act for a particular set of virtuous ends whenever those ends are called for. But apart from having practical wisdom or *phronesis*, such an agent may not know the right means to achieve a virtuous end.<sup>91</sup> Thus, a doctor who has the putative virtue of compassion will be disposed to act for the end of healing her patient, but apart from having practical wisdom she may not know how to heal her patient. A doctor who both has the virtue of compassion and *phronesis* will be virtuous in the strict sense because she will both aim

for compassionate ends and know the means to achieve those ends. For this reason, Aristotle claims that virtue “makes the goal right” and *phronesis* “the things toward the goal.”<sup>92</sup>

Some Aristotle commentators deny that instantiating the virtues by themselves gives one the capacity to aim for the right goal, and they claim that *phronesis* has the function of allowing its possessor to grasp both the right and the right means to achieving a virtuous end. John McDowell, for example, argues that in stating that virtue “makes the goal right” and *phronesis* “the things toward the goal,” Aristotle only means that *phronesis* does not “make it the case” that the goal is right. For McDowell, in other words, someone who is trained to have virtuous motivations will care about having the right goal, but the ability to discern the right goal from the wrong one is a rational capacity which comes from having *phronesis*. Thus, *phronesis* does not “make it the case” that the virtuous agents’ goal is right, because without the right “motivational propensities” she will not necessarily have an interest in acting for the sake of the right goal.

McDowell’s reading of Aristotle’s claim in EN 6.12.1144a7-9, however, does not seem to be supported by other claims about virtue in Nicomachean Ethics. For instance, Aristotle also claims that “either natural or habituated virtue” can be what “makes the goal right.”<sup>93</sup> He also distinguishes “natural” virtue from virtue “in the strict sense” by claiming that the latter includes “*phronesis*.”<sup>94</sup> If even the kind of virtue which does not

include *phronesis* “makes the goal right”, then it seems that McDowell is mistaken in claiming that grasping the right goal is the function of *phronesis* and not virtue itself.

By my definition of a right action, it should be clear that an agent need not be virtuous in order to perform a virtuous or right action. Just as Kant famously held that a shopkeeper could give back correct change for selfish reasons, it is trivially true that agents can do moral acts out of all kinds of motives.<sup>95</sup> Aristotle allows for this by claiming that someone who lacks virtues because of her “bad appetites” can perform virtuous acts even though she herself is not virtuous.<sup>96</sup> In such cases, however, they are doing what an agent would do in the circumstances who acted with the relevant virtuous motive and knew how to achieve the relevant virtuous end, and therefore their action is right even if it is done for vicious or non-virtuous reasons.

### *The Habit Thesis*

While it should be clear that for Aristotle, one need not be a virtuous agent in order to do virtuous acts, what is less clear is whether or not an agent can act out of virtue regardless of whether or not they exercise their practical wisdom. However, I claim that this is possible. To make such a claim is not to deny that, for Aristotle, an agent cannot be virtuous without also being practically wise. For Aristotle, however there are times when there is simply no time for an agent to deliberate about the right means to achieve virtuous ends, and therefore not all token acts which are performed out of a virtue are necessarily practically wise.<sup>97</sup> This claim that token acts out of virtue can be

performed apart from the exercise of practical wisdom will inform my claim in Chapter Four that virtues are ordinary habits. I am therefore calling this thesis “the habit thesis”.

My claim that one can act out of virtue without deliberating does not mean that for Aristotle, it is necessarily possible to act out of virtue without deliberating *at any point in time*. When discussing actions which are performed out of the virtue of courage in response to sudden dangers, Aristotle claims that such actions involve “commitment” (*prohaeresis*).<sup>98</sup> But such actions also leave no time for “calculation and reason”.<sup>99</sup> If this claim is coherent, then it would seem that acts out of courage and other virtues which Aristotle says “leave no time for calculation and reason” include commitments in the sense that they are the product of earlier deliberate choices in the following way. At some point in time, the agent who acts out of such a virtue must have made a conscious decision to develop this virtue, or deliberately decided to engage in token virtuous acts which caused her to develop the virtue, or both. Thus, I am allowing that for Aristotle, acts out of virtues such as courage involve a commitment, because they involve long-term decisions to develop virtues as automatic habits which can trigger responses to immediate dangers.

### *Objections to the Habit Thesis*

One objection to the habit thesis is that it implausibly conflates Aristotle’s ethics with a Humean emotivism according to which our ends are set solely by our desires rather than by reasoning. On this account, practical reasoning is defined as reasoning about the best way to achieve ends that are set by an agent’s desires. A number of



Aristotle commentators have labeled this account “Humean.”<sup>100</sup> Whether or not this is the view which Hume himself held is a controversy which is beyond the scope of this paper, but I will continue to call this view Humean for lack of a better name. But as Jessica Moss points out, although the moral virtues are non-rational for Aristotle, they are still cognitive.<sup>101</sup> For Aristotle, while only rational animals are capable of intellectual cognition, non-rational animals are capable of another type of cognition which Aristotle calls “phantasia”, or the reception of appearances which also takes place in the non-rational part of the soul for humans.<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, Aristotle claims that it is this kind of non-rational cognition which makes the right goal appear to the virtuous person.<sup>103</sup> Therefore, if virtues “make the goal right” and the virtues are non-rational, it does not follow that the virtues merely involve having non-cognitive desires.

Another objection to the habit thesis is that the habit thesis seems to trivialize the importance of the intellect for Aristotelian moral virtues.<sup>104</sup> If it is possible for an agent to act out of virtue apart from practical wisdom, then it seems strange that Aristotle would claim that there can be no virtue in the strict sense without it.<sup>105</sup> But the habit thesis in no way trivializes the importance of practical wisdom. Practical wisdom has two critical functions for Aristotle but in neither of these functions is it necessary for *phronesis* to grasp the ends of virtuous actions or be exercised with every token virtuous act. First, as I have stated in Section One of this chapter, Aristotle claims that non-rational perception cannot be the *ergon* of human beings.<sup>106</sup> For Aristotle, the human *ergon* must be one which is distinctive of human beings and since animals other than humans are capable of non-rational cognition, rationality is necessary for human

functioning. Second, Aristotle argues that the virtues can be harmful without *phronesis*.<sup>107</sup> Even if the function of *phronesis* is limited to means-end reasoning, it should still be clear why this is so. An agent who has good intentions will be little more than a bungling do-gooder if they are unable to deliberate well about achieving the right ends. Thus, far from being trivial for Aristotle, the intellect is critical for virtue, but the critical role that the intellect plays for virtue is compatible with the habit thesis.

## **Section 2.2 Virtue Ethics Compared to Other Moral Theories**

### **Section 2.2.1 Introduction**

I now come to the part of my argument about deontic theories in which I claim that such theories are untenable insofar as their requirements make it impossible for human agents to live flourishing lives. (Hereafter, I will refer to such untenable theories as *virtue incompatible* theories).

My argument that virtue incompatible theories are objectionable is a reconstruction of Bernard Williams' basic argument, famously laid out in two papers, in which he claimed that certain deontological and utilitarian theories are objectionable insofar as they alienate agents from their ground projects.<sup>108</sup> Williams defined such ground projects as an agent's set of most deeply held projects, commitments and desires. Such ground projects, for Williams, are identity forming in the sense that being able to maintain such projects is a condition of one's existence. If an agent were forced to give them up it is unclear why she should go on living at all.<sup>109</sup>

The fact that according to a particular moral theory, there are moral requirements which might alienate an agent from her ground projects does not necessarily make such a theory objectionable. If this were an objectionable feature of moral theories, then this would entail that every moral theory is objectionable except for egoism. Since an agent's ground project might make her committed to such objectionable endeavors as ethnic cleansing, it seems that any reasonable moral theory would alienate her from such a project.<sup>110</sup> What Williams seems to have discovered to be a problem with only a certain sub-set of non-egoistic moral theories, however, is that the requirements of such theories can even alienate agents from morally neutral projects which make their lives worth living.

There are two alienating features of this objectionable sub-set of moral theories. The first feature has to do with the way in which they can require moral agents to only value their ground projects in strict proportion to how valuable they are from the impersonal perspective of producing the best possible state of affairs. The problem with such a requirement, as Samuel Scheffler argues, is that people normally care about such projects out of proportion to their value in an impersonal ranking of overall states of affairs.<sup>111</sup> While every non-egoistic moral theory may require an agent to put aside a ground project at some point, they do not all require agents to only value these projects to the extent that they are valuable for the production of the best state of affairs. What Williams exposes, however, is that from the perspective of some moral theories, even ground projects which involve commitments to morally noble projects such as preserving human life will only be valuable insofar as they promote the best states of

affairs. The second problem is that they can require agents to act out of motives or deliberate about reasons which are too impersonal to allow them to pursue ground projects when these ground projects take the form of personal relationships.

The first problem is a problem which Williams argues is an objectionable feature of utilitarianism, but others have since argued that Williams identified a problem with all consequentialist theories which require agents to deliberate about promoting the best consequences, however the “best consequences” may be defined (hereafter *maximizing consequentialism*).<sup>112</sup> As I am reconstructing it, Williams’ argument is not an objection to every form of consequentialism, since not every consequentialist will require agents to deliberate about the best consequences. Some consequentialist theories define rightness as whatever promotes the best consequences but do not require deliberating about the best consequences, and other consequentialist theories do not define rightness in terms of the best consequences.<sup>113</sup> Neither Michael Slote’s satisficing theory of consequentialism or Scheffler’s hybrid consequentialism, for example, include the claim that right actions maximize some good.<sup>114</sup> It may be the case that the scope of Williams’ argument can be reconstructed to include a wider range of consequentialists, but I am not arguing for such a claim. For our present purposes I am only concerned with how Williams’ argument affects maximizing consequentialists.

The second problem is a problem with Kant as well as any deontologist who claims that agents ought to act out of the motive of duty including W.D. Ross and neo-Kantians such as Barbara Herman.<sup>115</sup> In the *Grounding*, and in *The Right and the Good*,

respectively, Kant and Ross claim that one must act out of the motive of duty in order for one's actions to either have moral worth or to be the best kinds of moral actions, and critics of these views have sometimes argued that requiring agents to act for the sake of duty can interfere with friendships, marriages, and other human relationships which would seem to demand that motives be more personal.<sup>116</sup> Michael Stocker, for example, has argued that such relationships seem to demand that at least some of the time one act for the sake of one's spouse or one's friend and not for the sake of some impersonal moral duty.<sup>117</sup> Williams goes even further than Stocker, however, in arguing that even neo-Kantian theories which do not always demand that an agent act for the sake of duty can even alienate agents from such relationships.

Neo-Kantians such as Barbara Herman have argued that, broadly speaking, for an agent to act from the motive of duty need not entail that the agent does not act for the sake of a friend, a spouse or for the sake of another morally permissible project. According to Herman, while an act must be performed for the sake of duty in order to have moral worth, this does not entail that an agent cannot act from other morally permissible motives. In one sense, such actions will also be performed from the motive of duty, but in such cases, the motive of duty will act as a "limiting condition" on what motives it is permissible for an agent to have.<sup>118</sup> What Williams seems to argue, however, is that even those deontic theories which require agents to deliberate about either what motive it is permissible to have or what project it is permissible for them to pursue can end up alienating such agents from morally permissible projects.

In arguing for this claim about alienation, Williams famously considers a case in which an agent is faced with an emergency which endangers the lives of two people. If the agent could save one but not both lives and both people were strangers to the agent, then it would seem that in such a case the agent ought to flip a coin in order to decide which one to save. If one of the two people in danger was the agent's spouse, however, then it would be absurd to require the agent to flip a coin, and those deontic theories which would permit the agent to save his spouse in such cases without flipping a coin are better in this regard than those theories which would not give him such a permission. But Williams argues that in such an emergency it would also be absurd to require the agent to think the conjunction of the thoughts "one of the two people in danger is my spouse" and "in such situations it is morally permissible to prefer one's spouse". Such a requirement unnecessarily burdens the agent with "one thought too many."<sup>119</sup> Requiring the agent to deliberate about the moral permissibility of preferring a wife, a friend, a lover or anyone else who bears a close personal relationship to her over a stranger can alienate an agent from the project of maintaining such a relationship. Such relationships seem to demand that an agent immediately know what to do when they have thoughts such as "one of the two people in danger is my spouse". Thus, an agent who would need to deliberate about the moral permissibility of saving one to whom they bear close personal ties over a complete stranger is one who *treats* the former as a stranger.

One objection to Williams' argument concerns his putative claim that an agent must be thinking of the moral permissibility of every token action just prior to acting. Marcia

Baron points out that in order to act from the motive of duty, it may not be necessary to think of the moral permissibility of one's actions every time one acts. Therefore, nothing about acting from the motive of duty would require someone to think about the moral permissibility of saving one's wife at the moment he is saving his wife.<sup>120</sup>

I think Baron is right to point out that there is a difference between morality requiring an agent to think about the moral permissibility of every type of act and morality requiring agents to think about every token act immediately prior to acting. It would be strange to imagine that morality would require thinking about every token act at all, let alone immediately prior to acting. It seems, for example, that morality demands that one should occasionally reflect on the permissibility of spending money on oneself for non-essential purposes such as entertainment in a world of tremendous poverty. But if one has decided that it is morally permissible to set aside a certain amount of one's budget to spend on entertainment instead of donating the money to charity, then it seems absurd to demand that every time one spends a portion of these entertainment funds, one needs to think about the moral permissibility of such an act. But I do not see how the moral requirement to think about the permissibility of saving one's spouse instead of a stranger becomes any less odd even if we are to grant that agents may not be required to do their thinking at any particular time. Certainly any credible moral theory would *allow* an agent to think about such a situation, but to require thinking about such a situation at any time seems objectionable. Thus, on my reading of Williams, it is not simply one thought too many to think about the moral

permissibility of saving one's wife instead of a stranger *at the urgent moment when one must choose*, it is one thought too many at any time.

### **Section 2.2.2 Alienation and My Account of Virtue Ethics**

In this section, I have argued that the alienation objection to certain consequentialist theories is different from the alienation objection to certain deontological theories. In order to show how my theory withstands the problems raised in both objections, I am now going to consider these objections in turn. I will then argue that despite appearances to the contrary, I can make use of the alienation arguments I have raised in this chapter without there being any logical inconsistency with the rest of my claims.

#### *Consequentialism*

Since I have argued that the alienation problem for consequentialist theories is that they require agents to value their ground projects in strict proportion to how valuable they are from the impersonal perspective of producing the best possible state of affairs, it should be obvious that my theory withstands this particular objection. I have reconstructed this objection in such a way that it only applies to those moral theories which have some account of the best possible state of affairs, and I have no such account to offer. While it may turn out that virtues are valuable for promoting the best state of affairs, I do not advance any theory of value for states of affairs. I have defined virtues as dispositions which are necessary conditions for being a good human being and good human beings as those who characteristically promote certain ends. I have no



argument to put forward, however, about whether a state of affairs with many good human beings is a better state of affairs than one with few good human beings.

### *Deontological Theories*

In this chapter, I argued that the alienation problem for deontological theories has to do with the moral requirement that agents engage in deliberation about what is either morally permissible or morally required of them at all times. In Chapter One, I considered Doris' claim that virtue ethics has no advantage over any other moral theory with respect to the issue of alienation, since in some way or another, virtue ethics will prescribe some form of "theoretical contemplation" for the non-virtuous agent. I take Doris to mean that unless an agent is fully virtuous, any virtue ethical theory will require her to think about the moral permissibility of her actions at all times and therefore virtue ethics is no less alienating than the deontological theories I have been considering.

I am not convinced by Doris' argument. As I have argued in this chapter, while all moral theories except for egoism are alienating to some extent, they are not all *objectionably* alienating. Moral theories are not objectionably alienating if they only require moral agents to renounce certain commitments such as a commitment to genocide, a commitment to being the most terrible neo-Nazi and other seemingly immoral projects. On my reading of Williams, however, moral theories become objectionably alienating when they alienate agents from morally neutral or even morally praiseworthy projects.

While I would agree with Doris that virtue ethical theories may all be alienating in the former sense, they do not have to be alienating in the latter, objectionable sense. In my judgment, there is nothing objectionable about a moral theory which requires an agent to engage in theoretical contemplation about what is the virtuous thing to do in every situation if an agent is imperfectly virtuous and may therefore be committed to immoral projects. Since such theoretical contemplation is only for those who may have immoral commitments, this is not an objectionable form of alienation. Virtue ethics, however, does not make it a necessary property of morality that agents are required to engage in theoretical contemplation.

The requirement of virtue ethics that agents engage in theoretical contemplation is a contingent property of morality and is required in the actual world because most human agents do not come into the world with virtuous motives and desires. Were they to do so, there would be no need for theoretical contemplation about what is either morally permissible or required in each situation. This is not the conception of morality which I read Kant, Ross and neo-Kantians such as Herman and Baron to hold. By their lights, if a moral agent fails to act from the motive of duty, however this motive may be understood, then the agent has either acted wrongly or in a manner which has no moral worth.

### *The Consistency of My Account*

I now turn to the objection that while Williams' alienation arguments are sound, they are arguments that only a reasons internalist can make us of and which I cannot

make use of with any logical consistency. In Section 2.1, I appeal to reasons externalism when I argue that it is not necessary that agents be motivated to care about their flourishing in order to have good reasons to care about their flourishing. According to the present objection, however, I cannot both claim that reasons externalism is true and rely on Williams' alienation argument because only a reasons internalist could agree with Williams' argument. To both rely on reasons externalism as I have and to claim that Williams' argument is sound is tantamount to claiming that reasons externalism is both true and not true, or so the objection goes.

According to the present objection, only a reasons internalist can be convinced by Williams' argument since the externalist denies that if S has a good reason to  $\phi$  then S necessarily can be motivated to  $\phi$ . Those who raise this objection would point out that since the externalist denies that motivations are necessary for having good reasons, the externalist cannot explain how the moral theories Williams finds objectionable alienate moral agents from what they have good reasons to do. As a reasons internalist, Williams could argue that agents have good reasons to maintain relationships with friends, spouses and so forth when they are motivated to have these relationships and they therefore should not be alienated from these relationships. But according to the present objection, a reasons externalist cannot easily explain why agents have good reasons to maintain these relationships.

As a rejoinder to this objection, it should be noted that the externalist does not have to maintain that an agent's motivations are *irrelevant* to her good reasons. For an

externalist, a motivation to  $\phi$  is not necessary for having a reason to  $\phi$ , since, for example, I may not be able to be motivated to provide for my children even though I have a reason to provide for my children. But externalism is also compatible with the claim that having a certain kind of motivation to  $\phi$  is jointly sufficient for having a reason to  $\phi$  along with other conditions. For example, it seems that if S is highly motivated to  $\phi$  and  $\phi$ -ing will not cause any more harm than not  $\phi$ -ing, then these two conditions are jointly sufficient for making it the case that S has a good reason to  $\phi$ . If I am highly motivated to eat an apple each day and my eating an apple each day will not cause any more harm than my not eating an apple each day, then any theory of justifying reasons would be untenable if it denied that I had a good reason to eat an apple each day.

Given these claims about reasons externalism, I can see no reason why a reasons externalist should deny the following claim. If an agent is highly motivated to maintain a relationship with his wife and maintaining such a relationship will not cause any more harm than not maintaining this relationship, then the agent has a good reason to maintain this relationship. Therefore, it seems that the reasons externalist can agree with Williams that moral theories alienate agents from what they have good reasons to do when their requirements interfere with the maintenance of such relationships.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I provided an account of virtue ethics, which, in subsequent chapters, I claim withstands the challenge from situationism. My account is an attempt

to explain the relationship between morality and being a good member of the human species, and I claim that insofar as virtue ethicists attempt to explain this relationship, it is philosophically interesting. I explain the relationship between good species membership and morality in a manner that is similar to other naturalist accounts which I call teleological accounts. A good human being, on this account, will promote certain ends for the human species in ways that are characteristic for the human species, and virtues are whatever character traits humans have that promote these ends in characteristic ways.

I have argued that other moral theories may not claim that the virtues are necessary for promoting the ends of the human species. They may be compatible with my theory, however, if it is possible to be virtuous according to my account and follow the prescriptions of such theories. Finally, I have argued that insofar as other moral theories alienate moral agents from good reasons for pursuing certain projects and commitments they are incompatible with my account.

## **Chapter 3: Replies to Situationism**

### **Introduction**

Now that I have both provided the evidence for situationist thesis and provided an account of virtue ethics, in this chapter I will consider the various ways that social psychologists and virtue ethicists have replied to situationism. I am undertaking this effort so that in the next chapter I can assess the adequacy of each of these replies in my attempt to find a convincing reply to situationism. I will argue that such a reply can be derived from the account of virtue ethics which I provided in Chapter Two.

In Chapter One, I stated that situationism involves both a social psychological and an ethical thesis. The social psychological thesis is the claim that “robust” personality traits, or personality traits that are both consistent across different situations and stable across similar situations, lack empirical support. Furthermore, since character traits are a subset of personality traits, the ethical thesis makes the following claim. Since robust personality traits lack empirical support, any form of virtue ethics which prescribes the development of robust character traits is empirically inadequate.

Given this distinction between these two theses, in this chapter I will devote separate sections to reconstructing the various replies to both situationist theses. I will

begin in Section One with the social psychological replies and then proceed to the ethical replies in Section Two.

### **Section 3.1: Social Psychological Replies to Situationism**

Among those replies to situationism that are social psychological in nature are the methodological reply, the outlier reply, the aggregation reply and the idiographic reply. I will consider each of these in turn.

#### **Section 3.1.1 The Methodological Reply**

The methodological reply to social psychological situationism is a reply which can best be characterized as raising doubts about this thesis by raising methodological complaints about some of the experiments which inform it. Both Rachana Kamtekar and Gopal Sreenivasan use this sort of argument in raising objections to Hartshorne and May's study of honesty among schoolchildren. In addition, the former also raises methodological objections to both Darley and Batson's "Good Samaritan" Experiment and Isen and Levin's "Dime" Experiment. I will first consider the complaints about Hartshorne and May before turning to Kamtekar's complaint about the two other experiments.

##### **Section 3.1.1.1 Hartshorne and May's Study**

I will begin considering Kamtekar and Sreenivasan's methodological complaints about Hartshorne and May by returning to my description of this experiment in Chapter One. In Chapter One, I stated that Hartshorne and May collected data on the putative

robust character trait of honesty among a sample of 8000 schoolchildren. The results of their data provided strong evidence for situationism, as Hartshorne and May found strong mean correlation coefficients for consistent behavior in different trials of the same situation, but surprisingly weak mean correlation coefficients for behavior across different situations. Among the strong mean correlations that Hartshorne and May found was .79 for cheating on a classroom test on multiple occasions; however, when they observed their subjects' behavior for lying in one situation and cheating in another, their mean correlation coefficients were only .31. Even more surprisingly, the mean correlation coefficient for lying and stealing was only .13.

The methodological complaints that Kamtekar and Sreenivasan raise about this experiment are as follows. First, Kamtekar complains that while the data from this experiment may be relevant for some purposes, it seems to have little relevance for making inferences about the existence of robust personality traits among adults, since children neither have personalities nor moral commitments that are as developed as adults.<sup>121</sup> In addition to this concern, Sreenivasan complains that Hartshorne and May derived their consistency coefficients by comparing behavior in situations which involved a clear temptation toward dishonest behavior with situations in which the temptations were morally ambiguous. Thus, rather than comparing behaviors among a situation which involved a clear case of cheating with situations involving a clear case of stealing, Hartshorne and May made the "cheating" situation one which involved a temptation to change answers on a test and the "stealing" situation one which involved pocketing spare change. Sreenivasan claims that it would have been more appropriate



to compare the former situation with a situation which involved a clear temptation to unambiguous stealing, such as shoplifting.

To see the importance of Sreenivasan's argument, one should consider the fact that, according to Sreenivasan, a child might not consider pocketing spare change to be a case of stealing, because she believes "finders keepers", while she is certain that changing one's answers on a test is cheating.<sup>122</sup> One can suppose that, in accordance with these beliefs, such a child is observed to pocket spare change, but not to change her answers on tests. According to Sreenivasan, someone studying behavior in these two situations would likely end up with spuriously low correlations between 'stealing-honesty' and 'cheating-honesty' and would likely conclude that one cannot predict whether one will be honest with personal property on the basis of how honest one is on tests. But this conclusion would not follow. Someone who pockets spare change might behave in a way that is consistent across different situations given that the appropriate situations are paired together. Thus, someone who is dishonest enough to pocket spare change in the stealing situation might also be dishonest enough to continue working on a test after time is called in the cheating situation although they are not dishonest enough to change their answers on a test. Moreover, someone who is honest enough to resist the temptation to change their answers on a test in the cheating situation might also be honest enough to resist the temptation to shoplift in the stealing situation although they are not honest enough to resist the temptation to pocket spare change. In this manner, by comparing unambiguous moral cases in one situation with ambiguous

moral cases in another situation, Sreenivasan argues that Hartshorne and May ended up with their alarming data through an unsound methodology.

### **Section 3.1.1.2 Worries About Sample Sizes**

Although Kamtekar and Sreenivasan have methodological worries about Hartshorne and May's study, this does not entail that they believe that every aspect of this study was methodologically unsound. For example, while Kamtekar faults Hartshorne and May for drawing conclusions about adults from data on observations of children, she grants that a sample of 8000 subjects would normally be an adequate one from which to draw such inferences.<sup>123</sup> For Kamtekar, however, what is methodologically sound about Hartshorne and May in this respect, is precisely what is methodologically unsound about the Dime Experiment and the Good Samaritan Experiment. Once again, the reader will recall that the data from both of these experiments reported strong correlations between helping behavior and changes in seemingly insignificant variables, namely the presence of small change and the subject's state of hurriedness, respectively. Kamtekar worries that one cannot draw any meaningful inferences from this data since both of these studies were only conducted on a sample of "about forty subjects."<sup>124</sup>

Kamtekar does not explain why the sample size for the Dime and Good Samaritan Experiments are too small for the purpose of making inferences about situationism, but it seems possible to speculate as to why this would be a concern. Perhaps Kamtekar is worried that the smaller the representative sample, the harder it becomes to falsify globalist claims about the existence of robust personality and character traits. To see

why, one can suppose that in two experiments, every subject was observed at separate cocktail parties, and each was observed acting shyly, but the data from the first experiment came from an observation of 1000 subjects chosen at random, while the second experiment involved an observation of only ten subjects chosen at random. The data from the first experiment would seem to support the thesis that “cocktail parties stimulate shyness” much more than the second experiment, for the following reason. If people do have robust personality traits, it seems much more likely that one could coincidentally pick ten people at random who share the same personality trait than it does that one could randomly pick 1000 people with the same personality trait. Thus, if one is observing ten subjects behaving shyly at a cocktail party, while it seems likely that their shy behavior could be caused by the situation of “being at a cocktail party”, it also seems likely that these ten subjects could all simply be shy people. However, if 1000 subjects were observed behaving this way, then it seems so unlikely that they could all be shy that the only reasonable explanation of their behavior must be that the situation of being at a cocktail party determined their behavior.

Given these considerations about the two cocktail party experiments, it seems that Kamtekar’s worry about the Dime and Good Samaritan experiments is as follows. As I stated in Chapter One, situationists such as Doris, Harman and Mischel frequently claim that the best explanation of the data from their experiments is that behavior is determined by subtle situational variables and not robust personality traits. Moreover, if the Dime and Good Samaritan experiments reported observations of the behavior of as many subjects as were in Hartshorne and May’s study, then it would be difficult to

disagree with such a thesis. In Chapter One, I stated that in the Dime experiment, 87.5% of those who found a dime helped a confederate pick up dropped papers, while only 4% of those who did not find a dime helped.<sup>125</sup> Similarly, in the Good Samaritan experiment, 63% of the subjects in the “low hurry” condition behaved helpfully, while only 10% of those helped in the “high hurry” condition.<sup>126</sup> If the data from each of these experiments was based on observations of 4000 people in each group, then, *ceteris paribus*, it would seem unlikely that this data could be caused by anything other than situational stimuli. Given these numbers, it is hard to imagine two things. First, it is hard to imagine that the vast majority of those in the dime finding group would also happen to be more compassionate than the vast majority of those in the non-dime finding group. Secondly, it is hard to imagine that the majority in the low hurry condition would also happen to be more compassionate than the vast majority in the high hurry condition. However, it is not hard to imagine that such coincidences could occur given experiments with roughly twenty subjects in each group.

### **Section 3.1.2 Realism of the Experiments**

Another methodological objection concerns the realism of the experiments used to inform situationism. According to this objection, how a subject is observed to behave in an experiment has little relevance for how she will behave in her natural surroundings. Those who raise this kind of objection neither deny that the subjects in these experiments acted in surprising ways, but they nonetheless maintain that one cannot make inferences about how a subject can be expected to behave from day to day based

on how the subject behaves in an experiment for one or both of the following reasons.

(1) The situation of the experiment is so artificial that one ought to worry that the subjects in the experiment did not take it seriously. This issue concerns what is sometimes known as the “experimental realism” of the study.<sup>127</sup> (2) The situation of the experiment is not one that the subject is likely to encounter often or even at all in the course of her lifetime. This issue concerns what is often called the “mundane realism” of the study. I will now consider how both of these concerns inform criticisms of at least some of the experiments we considered in the last chapter.

### **Section 3.1.2.1 Experimental Realism**

While it is not clear that worries about experimental realism affect all or even most of the experiments that inform situationism, some have raised worries about Milgram’s Obedience Experiment, and Zimbardo’s Prison Experiment. I will now state the reasons for these worries.

#### *Experimental Realism in Milgram’s Obedience Experiment*

In some cases, doubts about the experimental realism of Milgram’s study have been taken to such an extreme that some have even doubted that the subjects of this experiment were even fooled by the experimental “cover story”. Steven Patton, for example, argues that the best explanation of why so many of the subjects in this experiment behaved so sadistically was not because they lacked any robust trait of compassion, but rather because they suspected all along that they were part of an elaborate hoax.

Patten claims that the subjects in the Milgram experiment must have suspected that they were part of a hoax since he finds it hard to imagine that anyone would have been fooled by Milgram's cover story. To understand Patten's reasons for this claim, let us first be reminded of this particular cover story. The reader will recall that Milgram's experimenter told the experimental subjects that they were indeed part of a real experiment, but the experiment was designed to test the effects of punishment on learning. Moreover, the subjects were also told that they were to take the role of the "teacher" in this experiment. They were told that their role as the teacher's is to punish a confederate, whom the subjects were told was the experiment's "learner", by administering an electrical shock to the learner every time he failed to memorize a series of words.

Patten claims that the subjects of this experiment must have suspected that what the experimenter told them was untrue, since it should have been obvious to them that their role as the experimental teacher was completely unnecessary. Not only could the experimenter have administered the "shocks" himself, but it was not even necessary for an actual person to administer the shocks. They could have easily been generated by a computer.<sup>128</sup> The subjects must have therefore suspected that they were the ones whose behavior was being tested and not the so called "learner".

Patten acknowledges that there are two obvious objections to his explanation of the data from the Milgram experiment. The first objection is that the results from a survey that was provided to the subjects after the experiment seems to refute his

hypothesis. The data from this survey reports that the vast majority of those who took part in this experiment were indeed fooled by cover story. The second objection is that the behavior of many of the subjects in the experiment is also difficult to explain given Patten's hypothesis. If the subjects knew that the experiment was a hoax, then it is unclear how to explain Milgram's report that it was "characteristic" of his subjects to respond to the experiment by showing some sign of stress either by sweating, trembling, stuttering, groaning or displaying some other sign of nervousness.<sup>129</sup> Furthermore, it is equally unclear how one explains the fact that, according to Milgram, fourteen of his forty subjects quit the experiment prematurely. If the subjects knew that the experiment was a hoax, then it seems they would have all calmly continued with the experiment to the end, assured as they would have been that they weren't harming anyone.

Patten replies to the first objection by arguing that the questions in this survey are so ambiguous that the data from this survey cannot be trusted. He also adds that even if the subjects understood the questions correctly, the claim that they would have no reason to lie in this survey is simply false. One reason they would have to lie is because they might have thought that admitting that they were deceived would spoil "an expensive and time-consuming experiment."<sup>130</sup> With respect to the second objection, Patten argues that both the reluctance that the subjects expressed about continuing the experiment and the signs of stress they displayed are compatible with believing that the experiment was a hoax. According to Patten, it is possible to believe that some proposition is true and when it comes to its truth still "undergo trials of self-doubt."<sup>131</sup>

Thus, it is possible that one could believe that Milgram's experiment was a hoax and yet experience extreme stress during the experiment because of one's doubts about one's beliefs.

### *Experimental Realism in Zimbardo's Experiment*

In Chapter One, I stated that Zimbardo's experiment was designed to simulate the conditions of a prison. The concern about the experimental realism of this study is somewhat different from Patten's concern about Milgram's study, as no was made to deceive the subjects of this experiment about the purpose of this experiment. Ali Banuazizi and Siamak Movahedi worry, however, that too many of the subjects of this experiment might have failed to take it seriously since, in their judgment, this simulation was a failure. They even claim that many aspects of the experiment that were created in an attempt to simulate a real prison experience actually did just the opposite by reminding the subjects that they were part of an experiment. For example, in order to simulate the experience of having one's head shaved, the "inmates" of this experiment wore nylon caps. But Banuazizi and Movahedi argue that while shaved heads in a real prison symbolize the fact that the inmate is "cast out [and] rejected" from society, these nylon caps reminded these experimental "inmates" that they were embarking on the "honorable and courageous act" of participating in an experiment.<sup>132</sup>

### **Section 3.1.2.2 Mundane Realism**

Prima facie, it would seem that those social psychological experiments for which concerns about mundane realism can be made are limited to those same kinds of



experiments for which concerns about experimental realism can be made. Many of the social psychological experiments I reconstructed in Chapter One seem to have a high degree of former for obvious reasons. It is all too common for individual subjects to find themselves making change for a dollar, smelling pleasant aromas, running ahead of schedule, running behind schedule, and being in other situations like those in which subjects were observed in these studies. Hopefully, however, most of these experimental subjects will never expect to find themselves either being incarcerated or being commanded to shock an innocent person in the name of science. But while some of these studies seem to have a higher degree of mundane realism than others, James Montmarquet worries that it is easy to overstate the degree of mundane realism for any “latitudinal” experiment that involves observing a subject’s behavior in no more than a few situations.

Montmarquet’s worry seems to be that while many of the social psychological experiments from Chapter One involve observations of a subject in day to day situations, any inferences about personality from these observations *alone* is bound to be unjustified. This is because what is not being observed in these experiments are what kinds of situations the subject would choose to be in regardless of whether these choices are a series of unrelated isolated choices, or the result of the subject’s “long term enterprises”.<sup>133</sup> Thus, while it may be the case that even the most seemingly anxious person might become calm if she happened to find herself in a Tibetan monastery and the most calm person would become anxious if she happened to find herself in a room full of venomous snakes, life is simply not a series of unrelated

situations which one *happens to find oneself in*. Whatever personality may be, it is revealed both in the situations in which we find ourselves and in the situations we chose to be in as we plan our careers, choose our relationships, move to certain communities, and so forth.

### **Section 3.1.3 The Idiographic Reply**

Another objection to situationism is the claim that the kinds of cross-situational correlations which inform this thesis provide us with an impoverished understanding of personality, since these correlations are only based on nomothetic method of measuring of personality traits and neglect the importance of idiographic measures. Personality traits are measured nomothetically when, in a sample population, every single individual is given a score along a certain personality dimension. For example, a study in which one selected 1000 subjects at random and scored them all for how aggressively they behaved in a variety of situations would be a study conducted according to the nomothetic method. Those who advocate adding an idiographic method, however, argue that it is not surprising if such a measure results in speciously low trans-situational correlations, since aggression may not be a relevant trait for every subject. In order to get a more complete understanding of personality, one therefore needs to employ the idiographic method by first determining which traits are relevant for which subset of individuals within a given population and only then by measuring the strength of the relevant trait among this subset. To determine which traits are relevant,

one needs to gather data on such matters as the subject's values, goals, life history, and so forth, to determine which traits are important to the subject.

### *Bem and Allen's Idiographic Method*

Empirical evidence for the claim that global dispositions will manifest themselves when the idiographic method is used comes from two primary sources. The first source is a study conducted by Daryl Bem and Andrea Allen which tested 64 subjects for the cross-situational traits of friendliness and conscientiousness. In one way, Bem and Allen's study was not unlike a nomothetic study in that it involved collecting data on cross-situational consistency by observing how friendly and conscientious these 64 subjects behaved across different friendliness-eliciting and conscientiousness-eliciting situations. What they claim made their study idiographic, however, was their procedure which involved first pre-screening the subjects by providing them with paper and pencil inventories designed to collect data on how consistent they were with respect to both personality traits.<sup>134</sup> Based on this data, Bem and Allen then divided their subjects up into four sub-groups according to their inventory scores, namely "high variability" (i.e. low consistency) and "low variability" (high consistency) sub-groups for each trait. The results of this study were as follows. Among the "high variability" sub-groups, the mean correlation for cross-situational friendliness and conscientiousness were only 0.27 and 0.22, respectively. Among the "low variability" groups, however, these mean correlations were 0.57 and 0.44, respectively. These higher correlations seem to support the hypothesis that evidence for trans-situational consistency can be obtained among

certain segments of the population if one first uses a pre-screening procedure for separating the trans-situationally consistent from the trans-situationally inconsistent. For Bem and Allen, the results of this study seemed to confirm their hypothesis that for certain personality traits, only certain members of the population can be given a meaningful score.

### *Mischel's Idiographic Method*

Somewhat surprisingly, the other source of this evidence is Walter Mischel. While Mischel was once highly skeptical of trans-situational traits, he now claims that there is clear evidence for trans-situational CAPS traits, or traits which are the components of a "cognitive-affective personality system".<sup>135</sup> According to Mischel, one can find clear evidence for these CAPS traits when one uses the idiographic method by defining situations both from an observer's perspective and from the subject's perspective. Before considering this evidence, however, it would perhaps be helpful to consider what using such a method would entail and what these CAPS traits are like.

To understand both of these matters, it is necessary to use a thought experiment. I will begin this thought experiment by stipulating that A and B are completely different situations according to an observer's point of view, such that A is an office and B is a public beach. Next, we will stipulate that Bob is extremely talkative and friendly in A-type situations, but quiet and reserved in B-type situations. However, when we consider Bob's point of view, we find that there is nothing about offices, per se, that made Bob act in an extroverted fashion in A, nor was there anything about beaches, per se, which

made him act in an introverted fashion in B. Rather, what made Bob act extrovertedly in A is the fact that Bob perceived A as being a friendly situation, and Bob acted introvertedly in B because he perceived B as being a hostile, threatening situation.

Let me now stipulate that Bob has the CAPS trait of behaving extrovertedly in situations he perceives as friendly. If one were to consider Bob's behavior from a neutral, observer's perspective, while Bob may be consistently extroverted certain situations and consistently introverted in others, these situations all seem to call for extroversion. One would therefore claim that Bob does not have a global trait of extroversion but several fragmented local traits of extroversion, since it would seem that one could not predict that Bob will act extroverted in any situation that calls for extroversion, but only in (say) offices, on airplanes, over breakfast, and so forth. However, when one considers Bob's situations both from a neutral perspective and from his perspective, one finds that Bob is extroverted in every situation that calls for extroversion from his point of view, although the situations that elicit extroversion from his point of view may not be situations that call for extroversion from a neutral point of view. One could thus agree that Bob behaves in a way that is trans-situationally consistent, but only if we define situations in a way that those who employ the idiographic method suggest.

Now I will turn to the evidence for these CAPS traits. Among the experiments which support such traits are a 1994 study which Mischel conducted along with Yuichi Shoda and Jack Wright. In this study, Mischel, Shoda and Wright observed the social behavior

of 84 children over six weeks in a summer camp to determine if there was evidence for any pro-social or anti-social CAPS traits among these children. In this study, when the subjects were observed in a situation such as a cabin meeting, a playground, a classroom, and so forth, Mischel classified this as the subject's "nominal situation". On the other hand, if the subject was observed to be "praised by an adult", "punished by an adult", "teased by a peer" and so forth, Mischel classified this as the subject's "interpersonal situation".

As a result of this study, Mischel and his colleagues found means for trans-situational correlations for these CAPS traits which were much higher than the 0.30 "personality barrier" which situationists have claimed is a ceiling for cross-situational correlations, and one mean correlation was as high as 0.45.<sup>136</sup> Such correlations were "trans-situational" in the sense that they were across nominal situations but within the same interpersonal situation. What Mischel and his colleagues concluded from this study was that consistency of behavior could be found "within the same types of psychological situations" even these same types of psychological situations occurred in very different nominal situations.<sup>137</sup> Put differently, subjects were found to act consistently in situations that were similar from their perspective, even if they were markedly different from an observer's perspective.

#### **Section 3.1.4 The Outlier Reply**

The next social psychological reply I will consider is the "outlier reply". Those who use this reply make very similar claims to those who worry about the methodology of

experiments with small sample sizes. However, I am distinguishing this reply from the methodological reply since those who use the “outlier reply” do not necessarily claim that there is anything methodologically unsound about the sample size used in each trial of a given experiment. They simply claim that since a given experiment has not been repeated often enough or it has been repeated with different results, any inferences one draws from the experiment would be unjustified.

The outlier reply relies on the inductive phenomenon according to which many different trials of a single event will occasionally result in data that is quite different from the data which is averaged over all the trials of a certain event. For example, one can imagine that someone is asked to reach into an opaque urn of 100 balls and pull out 10 balls at random. In this urn, there are 60 black balls and 40 white balls that are distributed as evenly as possible. Given this distribution of white and black balls, the average person could be expected to remove exactly six black balls and four white balls. In fact, if there were ten separate urns, each of which had this same number of white and black balls, we could predict that this would be the mean result. However, it is possible that in these ten trials, one or two trials would report data that is wildly inconsistent with the mean. Perhaps one person pulled out ten black balls, for example, or even ten white balls. Moreover, the more trials take place, the more probable it becomes that such “outliers” will occur on at least one occasion.

According to the outlier reply, without repeated trials of a certain experiment, one simply do not have enough data to know whether these experiments are outliers or

whether they report findings that are consistent with what the mean data would be after the data from several trials is averaged. If the latter is the case, then the alarming conclusions that situationists draw from these experiments is warranted. If the former is the case, however, then these conclusions are unwarranted.

While no one could seriously claim that all of the experiments which inform the situationist thesis are outliers, it may be the case that a few of them are. Among these are Zimbardo's prison experiment and Isen and Levin's dime experiment. Since the former has never been repeated, enough cannot be known about the subjects' behavior in this experiment to warrant making any strong inductive inferences about trans-situational traits within the population that they are purported to represent.<sup>138</sup> Without additional trials of this experiment, one is free to speculate that the behavior of the 'guards' in this experiment is due to the unlikely event that a few sadistic individuals were selected to be a part of this experiment out of an otherwise compassionate and pro-social population. In the same manner, in an experiment in which one is trying to determine the ratio of white to black balls in an opaque urn of 100 balls, one would not have enough information to make a strong inductive inference after only one trial in which a participant withdrew (say) five white balls and 0 black balls. From this event, one should infer that all of the balls in the urn are white, but this is surely a weak inference without additional trials.

In addition to these concerns about Zimbardo's experiment, concerns become even greater upon turning to Isen and Levin's Dime Experiment. As I have already noted in



this chapter, in Isen and Levin's experiment, 87.5% of those in the "dime finding group" helped a confederate pick up dropped papers, while only 4% of those who did not find a dime helped. As Christian Miller points out, however, experiments which closely resembled this one have not always achieved the same results.<sup>139</sup> In an experiment that was identical to Isen and Levin's except for the minor detail that it involved dropped packages instead of dropped papers, Blevins and Murphy report that only 40% of those in the "dime finding" group helped the confederate, while 43% of those in the group that did not find a dime did not help.<sup>140</sup> Moreover, while Levin and Isen found similar results to the original dime experiment in a version that included stamped letters, Miller also points out that Weyant and Clark failed to replicate these results "using five different locations and over four times as many test subjects".<sup>141</sup> In Levin and Isen's study, 91% of the "dime finding" subjects mailed a stamped letter that was left behind in the phone booth, while only 31% of the "non-dime finding" subjects did the same.<sup>142</sup> But in Weyant and Clark's study, only 23% of the "dime finding" subjects mailed the letter and 29% of the "non-dime finding" subjects did the same.<sup>143</sup> Since the data from different versions of the dime experiment is wildly inconsistent, it seems that any inferences that could be drawn from these experiments would be unjustified.

### **Section 3.1.5 The Aggregation Reply**

A similar reply to the outlier reply is Seymour Epstein's "aggregation" reply. Like those who use the outlier reply, Epstein claims that one cannot make any strong inductive inferences about cross-situational personality traits without conducting many

additional trials of the experiments which inform situationism. But whereas one who uses the outlier reply are interested in testing a larger sample of the population than those few subjects who were tested in these experiments, Epstein is interested in conducting a greater number of trials on the *same* subjects.

Epstein's argument is that just as the behavior of a few people may not be representative of the behavior of an entire population, in the same manner, a subject's behavior on one occasion may not be representative of how she generally behaves. For example, a baseball player who has a batting average of .300 or above is usually considered a reliable hitter, but on most occasions when he is at bat, a baseball player with a .300 average will not get a hit. In the same manner, a person who is observed to behave inconsistently in two situations may be observed to be far more consistent when one observes her behavior in thirty different situations.

Epstein argues that multiple observations of a group's cross-situational behavior have a certain advantage over single observation of a group's cross-situational behavior. This advantage is that the "error" of random factors in a single observation influence behavior and therefore interfere with a measure of an agent's true dispositions.<sup>144</sup> But when an agent is observed over multiple occasions these random factors "cancel each other out."<sup>145</sup> Thus, what emerges is a true measure of an individual's personality instead of a speciously low cross-situational correlation.

In order to appreciate Epstein's argument, one should grant that most agents may be observed to help someone in distress when they are not in a hurried state and to

ignore someone in distress when they are in a hurried state. What would follow from observing a group of agents in a single hurried state and a single non-hurried state is that there would be a low-correlation between helping in the hurried state and helping in the non-hurried state. But one could also imagine that over the course of a month, a given agent could classify all her varying states of hurriedness according to a scale of 1 to 10 in the following way. Whenever she is experiencing no hurriedness she would classify her state as a '1', and whenever she experiences the most extreme state of hurriedness imaginable, she classifies her state as a '10'. Furthermore, if a state of hurriedness is more like a '10' than a '1' it will be higher on the scale, and if it is more like a '1' than a '10', it will be lower on the scale. Given this scale, it seems reasonable to expect that most people, over the course of this time period, will experience a couple of states that can be classified as either a 1 or a 10, but the vast majority of her experiences will be in the range of 2-9. What Epstein argues is that over this length of time the high and low numbered states will cancel each other out so that what will emerge is a clearer picture of what a given agent will do in an 'average' situation. In the same manner, while there will be a low correlation between whether a batter gets a hit when facing an excellent baseball pitcher and whether he gets a hit when facing the worst pitcher in the league, a hitter's "batting average" is a prediction of what the hitter will do when facing an average pitcher. Epstein argues, in fact, that a correlation of .16 between two observations of a single behavior becomes as high as .63 over nine observations and even as high as .83 over 25 observations.<sup>146</sup>

Epstein also argues that this failure to aggregate scores over multiple situations explains why data from paper and pencil self-reports (S-data) and peer evaluations (R-data) have high correlations between them, but both forms of data have low correlations with tests which measure objective behavior (T-data). In Chapter Two, I considered how social psychologists such as Mischel claim that these low correlations are explained by the fact that the former are unreliable and ultimately only report one's conception of personality rather than one's objective measurement of personality. But Epstein used his aggregated data to argue that there is another explanation for these low correlations. S-data and R-data only state what one is like *in general* and it is inappropriate to compare what one would do in general to data from observations of behavior in a single situation or a pair of situations. It is only appropriate to compare S-data and R-data to T-data that comes in the form of aggregated scores, and when one does this, Epstein argues, one should find much higher correlations between these scores than situationists are fond of reporting.

In order to confirm this hypothesis, Epstein conducted one study in which forty-five undergraduate students were asked to collect T-data on themselves every day over a fourteen day period. For each day out of that fourteen day period, the students were asked to report such things as the number of social phone calls they made and received, the number of social letters they wrote and received, the number of headaches and stomachaches they had, their mood, and so forth. Prior to beginning this fourteen day experiment, however, the students were also given a few personality inventories in order to collect S-data. When Epstein compared the average student's T-data over this

fourteen day period with these personality inventories, he found correlations in the range of .40-.70.<sup>147</sup> The results of this experiment seem to suggest that the extremely low correlations between “paper and pencil” reports and T-data may not be due to the unreliability of self reports, but may instead be due to the failure to compare paper and pencil reports to the appropriate kind of T-data.

### **Section 3.2 Virtue Ethical Replies to Situationism**

Now that I have considered the various ways in which social psychologists have replied to situationism, we turn now to the way in which others have argued that situationism does not have the implications for virtue ethics that Doris and Harman claim. These arguments are the bullet biting reply, the overestimation reply, the empirical modesty reply, the conflict reply, the anti-behaviorist reply, and the outsourcing reply. I will reconstruct each of these replies in turn.

#### **Section 3.2.1 The Bullet-Biting Reply**

Along with all the replies I shall consider in this section, those who employ the bullet biting argument fully accept the methodological soundness of the body of experiments that inform situationism. However, I refer to their replies as “bullet-biting” because unlike the other replies we are considering in this section, they go beyond merely accepting the experimental data. They also generally accept the conclusions that Doris and Harman draw from this data as they concede that this body of experiments represents a serious challenge to the virtue ethical tradition. None the less, they remain committed to this tradition for one reason or another. Peter Goldie, and Michael

Winter and John Tauer employ two different forms of this reply. I will now describe their different replies.

*The Bullet-Biting Reply for Goldie*

According to Goldie, the lesson of situationism is that in order to be virtuous at all, one needs to have the “executive virtue” of circumspection.<sup>148</sup> Goldie claims that since situationism has provided strong empirical evidence for believing that our motives in certain situations are often “beyond our conscious awareness”, we would be advised to exercise proper circumspection about such motives by “plotting against [our] future [selves]”.<sup>149</sup> If, for instance, one knows that the situation of having a chocolate bar in one’s refrigerator will cause one to be intemperate at night, then, according to Goldie, one should “make sure there isn’t any there”.<sup>150</sup> Thus, while Goldie accepts that while seemingly insignificant features of situations can have a profound impact on character, he believes that one can maintain one’s character by simply being prepared for these insignificant features.

*The Bullet-Biting Reply for Winter and Tauer*

A more interesting version of the bullet-biting argument comes from Winter and Tauer, who charge Doris with being logically inconsistent in claiming that character is strongly influenced by subtle situational variables. Winter and Tauer note that on one hand, Doris claims to be suspicious of a priori claims in ethics as he urges supplementing “reflection on intuitions” with “less speculative methodologies” such as social psychological experimentation.<sup>151</sup> On the other hand, however, Doris claims that

“insubstantial factors” such as hurriedness, finding small bits of change, aromas, orders from authorities, and so forth have a major role in determining behavior without citing any experiments which would demonstrate that such factors are indeed insubstantial.<sup>152</sup> Winter and Tauer claim, however, that determining whether such factors are substantial or insubstantial is an empirical matter and not a conceptual matter.

What follows from this putative inconsistency for Winter and Tauer is that while Doris has become skeptical of robust character traits because of experiments involving these “insubstantial factors”, perhaps there is a better explanation of this experimental data. The better explanation is that agents do have robust character traits, but factors which common sense has long held to be insubstantial in determining behavior are in fact quite substantial. Furthermore, moral agents can learn from these experiments by preparing themselves for situations that include such factors. Quoting Winter and Tauer at length on this matter should help explain their position:

If repeated experiments show that mood dramatically affects helping behavior, for example, then....we ought to attend to our mood and our values more carefully than it may seem initially. We might also learn that environment influences our actions more than we expect...or that authority figures have a profound impact on how we act in a situation. If robust character traits exist, then we would expect that coming to know such principles through experience is part of what it takes to develop robust character traits in an attempt to behave consistently with our values.<sup>153</sup>

Thus, while Winter and Tauer seem to agree with Goldie about the importance of being circumspect about situational factors, they also add a further claim. What would aid this circumspection is empirical data about the kinds of situational factors to be on guard against, since one's common sense intuitions about the power of these factors cannot be trusted.

### **Section 3.2.2 Sabini and Silver's Overestimation Reply**

John Sabini and Maury Silver are those who have advanced what I am calling the "overestimation reply". I choose this name because while Sabini and Silver grant that situationists are correct to observe that the data from experimental social psychological data poses challenges for virtue ethics, situationists nevertheless overestimate the seriousness of this challenge. Sabini and Silver agree that the studies which are purported to support situationism provide us with reasons for believing that being virtuous in certain situations is extremely difficult, and that this is due to subtle features of these situations that often escape an agent's notice. Nonetheless, Sabini and Silver claim that conceding these points to the situationist do not give us a sufficient reason to be convinced by their thesis, as they deny that these subtle features are either pervasive enough to make character development impossible, or to make virtue ethics empirically inadequate.

In order to support their argument, Sabini and Silver employ a strategy that involves claiming that there is a common sense explanation of some of the data which does not require invoking "subtle situational forces" and dismissing whatever data cannot be



explained as not being of any real significance for character.<sup>154</sup> Among the data which Sabini and Silver attempt to explain is the data from Milgram's obedience experiment and Darley and Batson's "Good Samaritan experiment", which, as I stated in Chapter One, seems to support the thesis that whether or not a subject helps someone in distress is strongly influenced by how hurried she is. Among the data which Sabini and Silver dismiss is Isen and Levin's dime experiment, which, as I also stated in Chapter One, seems to support the thesis that finding a small amount of change influences whether or not someone acts compassionately.

Sabini and Silver claim that far from disclosing something about "subtle situational forces", these experiments only confirm a well-known lesson from common sense, namely, that Western people's perceptions of the world are normally influenced by the perception of the world that the people around them share. Moreover, when Westerners find themselves with perceptions of the world that seem to conflict with the perceptions of those around them, they become confused and it embarrasses them to have to confront those with these different perceptions. This would both explain why the subjects in Milgram's study had a difficult time confronting the experimenter who ordered them to shock a confederate, and why the subjects in Darley and Batson's experiment ignored someone in distress. Even though both of these experiments seemed to demand compassionate action, acting compassionately in either of these situations required confronting another person's perception of the situation with a competing perception of the situation, and most of the subjects in these experiments either found themselves too confused or too embarrassed (or both) to do this. In the

Milgram experiment, most of the subjects found themselves confused by the fact that the experimenter seemed to believe that it was morally acceptable to shock the confederate 'learner' and in Darley and Batson's experiment, those in a hurry did not want to deal with the "interpersonal difficulty" of being late, even though they may have perceived the situation with the distressed confederate as requiring their immediate attention.<sup>155</sup> Whatever their own perception of this situation might have been, attending to the confederate would have required them to provide others with an explanation for why they were late, and these others may not have perceived the situation as they did, namely as one which made tardiness permissible. The data from Isen and Levin's experiment, on the other hand, does not seem to reveal anything interesting about fear of embarrassment or competing perceptions of the world, but Sabini and Silver deny that whether or not someone picks up dropped papers "is a very important manifestation of a moral trait."<sup>156</sup>

Sabini and Silver claim that there are a few prescriptions which can be drawn from this data which will enable people to become better moral agents, such as 'be wary when your moral perceptions seem to be at odds with others' and 'understand that it is hard to confront other people who are doing wrong', but they find little other use for this data. They interpret situationism as providing a much more vague prescription, namely "be sensitive to situational features that may affect your behavior in subtle ways".<sup>157</sup> Furthermore, this prescription is utterly useless for the same reason that vague warnings about terrorism are useless. They tell people to be suspicious of everything, and it isn't possible to be suspicious of everything.

### Section 3.2.3 The Empirical Modesty Reply

Those who use the empirical modesty reply concede that no other conclusion can be drawn from decades of empirical data that comes from social psychology than that situationism is basically true, and that very few people are fully virtuous. Nonetheless, those who advance this argument make one of two claims about this body of data. One claim is that this body of data has much more to do with a straw man of virtue ethics than any true form of virtue ethics. According to this argument, nothing about belonging to this Aristotelian tradition commits one to the ambitious empirical claim that most people are fully virtuous. The other claim is that regardless of whether situationism represents a straw man of the Aristotelian tradition, there are more empirically modest strands in the virtue ethical tradition that can evade the situationist critique. Nomy Arpaly, Diana Fleming, Joel Kupperman, Christian Miller, and Michael Winter and John Tauer are among those who, in various ways, have argued for the first sort of claim, while Maria Merritt and Michael De Paul have argued for the second claim.<sup>158</sup> Since there are few important differences between the various ways in which this empirical modesty reply has been employed, for the sake of brevity I will only consider the ways in which three persons have employed this argument, namely Merritt, Miller and De Paul.

#### *The Empirical Modesty Reply for Merritt*

Merritt's empirical modesty reply combines both an admission that situationism makes the Aristotelian strand of virtue ethics untenable, with a further claim that it represents no real threat to the Humean strand of this tradition. Hume makes more

empirically modest claims than Aristotle, Merritt argues, since the Humean moral agent does not need to develop a state of “sage-like perfection” before she can be said to be virtuous, as Hume recognizes that virtues are largely socially sustained. In addition, Hume is more philosophically modest, insofar as he has no account of “what ends are of genuine worth in life.”<sup>159</sup> For this reason, Humean virtues only exist for the sake of “avoiding human disaster” and “securing the basic goods of a cooperative society”. To put these points succinctly, Humean virtues thus only exist for the good of society, and they are only sustained within a good society.

Merritt does not specify the ways in which these more modest Humean virtues might allow her theory to evade the situationist critique, but given Hume’s account of the virtues, one can speculate as to how Merritt might provide an example of how Hume evades this critique. I will do this by considering the particular Humean virtue of justice.

Justice, for Hume is the virtue of obeying and respecting the rules and regulations of society as it pertains to the institution of property. But it is also clear that, according to Hume, a society of persons who have the virtue of justice is not a society of morally ideal agents, since such a society would have no use for private property. In a society of ideal agents, Hume claims that “every [person] would be a second self to another.”<sup>160</sup> This is due to the fact that each agent would put the interest of his neighbor ahead of her own. I would have no need in such a society, for example, to purchase a plot of land to use according to my own interests if I knew that my neighbor had my best interests at

heart. A society which has private property is therefore one in which agents “are naturally partial to [themselves] and to [their] friends”.<sup>161</sup> What follows from these considerations is that justice, for Hume, is not a virtue for ideal agents who have attained “sage-like perfection”, but is instead a virtue for imperfect agents who care about living the best possible life they can enjoy together in a cooperative society.

In addition to these considerations, it is also clear that while there would be no use for the virtue of justice in a society of ideal agents, there may be societies which may have no need for justice even if it is impossible for agents to obviate the need for justice by being perfectly selfless and benevolent. For example, a society with extreme scarcity of necessities for sustaining life would have no need for the virtue of justice, just as after a shipwreck it is no crime to seize whatever one needs for one’s survival “without regard to former limitations of property”.<sup>162</sup> In such a condition, Hume claims, justice would be useless as people would have no more reason to fear the evils that would arise from injustice than they would to fear suffering and death from a lack of basic goods.

From these considerations it is clear that for Hume, justice will only be sustained within certain kinds of societies and it only exists for the sake of certain kinds of societies. Justice thus meets Merritt’s criteria of being a “philosophically modest” virtue since it only serves an agent’s interest in pursuing happiness within a cooperative society. It is also an “empirically modest” virtue, since it is not robust enough to survive extreme changes in one’s social environment.

Merritt anticipates that some will criticize her more modest conception of virtue ethics by asserting that she does not understand why virtues are of value. According to this objection, virtues are of value because those agents who possess them maintain their moral commitments when society no longer encourages virtuous behavior and may even encourage vicious behavior. But if Merritt allows for the possibility that a fully virtuous agent could cease to be virtuous once the social support for her virtue collapses, then it seems one must wonder what makes her virtues worth developing.

Merritt replies to this objection by claiming that one does not have a reason to resist depending on social support for one's virtuous qualities simply because in certain extreme situations this social support could collapse. Certainly most of the time moral agents do not find themselves in such extreme circumstances. Most of the time, rather, agents find themselves living in a cooperative society, and they require the kinds of dispositions that will help them live well within such a society. It would be absurd, Merritt claims, to find no worth in these dispositions simply because it is possible that one day one might find oneself living in profoundly different conditions.

#### *The Empirical Modesty Reply for Miller*

Miller has accused situationists of conceiving the instantiation of virtues as an "all-or-nothing phenomenon" in which one either instantiates the virtues completely or not at all.<sup>163</sup> If this were not so, situationists such as Doris and Harman would not take the data from their experiments as providing evidence for the claim that virtues are not widely instantiated. Miller concedes that the behavior of most of the subjects in

experiments like this one provide clear evidence of the fact that many situations can stimulate vicious behavior. Let us recall that according to Doris, on average, two-thirds of subjects in this study obey the experimenter to the bitter end everywhere this experiment is tried. However, this need not entail that most participants in these experiments are vicious; rather, it could entail that while a few of them are vicious, the vast majority of them are just imperfectly virtuous. Moreover, Miller argues that even if situationists were able to provide data which supports the thesis that most people don't even have virtues to a moderate degree, even this data would not undermine virtue ethics, since Aristotle "locates most people somewhere between continence and incontinence."<sup>164</sup>

#### *The Empirical Modesty Reply for De Paul*

De Paul shares Miller's perspective on the situational literature, although he claims to examine them from the standpoint of someone who is interested in defending Platonic virtues. For example, De Paul considers the fact that only ten percent of the subjects in Darley and Batson's experiment who were in the hurry condition helped the distressed confederate. Situationists such as Harman claim that this would come as a surprise to virtue ethicists, but De Paul claims that this would not surprise Plato at all. Since Plato considered full virtue to be extremely rare, De Paul claims that what would surprise him is that even *this many* subjects stopped and helped.<sup>165</sup>

### Section 3.2.4 The Conflict Reply

Those who employ the conflict reply employ one of two arguments in their rejoinder to situationism. On one hand, they may claim that the subjects in the experiments I have reconstructed are guilty of some moral failure because they were caught in a moral dilemma with no morally permissible options. On the other hand, they may not claim that these experiments pitted two moral duties against each other, but they at least pitted two robust dispositions against each other. To see how they employ both forms of this argument, I will now consider the examples of Rachana Kamtekar who uses the former type of reply and Robert Solomon, who uses the latter type of reply.

#### *The Conflict Reply for Kamtekar*

Kamtekar claims that the best explanation of the data from the Milgram experiment and Darley and Batson's experiment is not that the subjects in these experiments generally lacked the virtue of compassion. With respect to the Milgram experiment, anyone who studies this experiment ought to conclude that it does not test whether agents can be cruel *simpliciter*; what it tests is whether or not agents can be cruel when they are ordered to do so by someone in authority, or so Kamtekar argues. Thus, the subjects in the Milgram experiment did not shock the confederate because they lacked the virtue of compassion, as no one who studies this experiment has suggested that two-thirds of the subjects in this experiment would shock someone if they were ordered to do so by just anyone. Rather, the subjects in the Milgram experiment shocked the



confederate because while they had a disposition to be compassionate, they had a stronger virtue of “obedience [and] cooperativeness”, and this explains why they were so obedient to the experimenter.<sup>166</sup> One can criticize the subjects in this experiment for their lack of compassion, but according to Kamtekar, the subjects in this experiment would have been guilty of some moral failing no matter what they did. Either they would have been guilty of lacking compassion on one hand, or they would have been guilty of disobeying authority and being uncooperative if they walked out of the experiment on the other hand.

With respect to Darley and Batson’s experiment, Kamtekar also explains this experiment in the same manner. One can criticize the subjects who were running late for failing to help the distressed confederate, but no matter what they did, they would have been guilty of failing to help someone. Either they would have been guilty of failing to help the confederate in distress on one hand, or they would have been guilty of failing to help the experimenter on the other hand, for whom they agreed to participate in the experiment.

#### *The Conflict Reply for Solomon*

Like Kamtekar, Solomon also claims that both of these experiments pit two robust dispositions against each other, but he denies that both robust dispositions are necessarily virtues. None the less, he reminds the reader that for Doris and Harman, the purpose of this experiment is not just to provide support for the thesis that people lack virtues, it is also to provide support for the thesis that people lack robust character

traits. However, while this experiment provides clear support for the former thesis, it fails to provide any support for the latter thesis.

Solomon claims that Milgram's obedience experiment does not support the situationist thesis that people generally lack robust character traits, since what the data from this experiment actually shows is that the character trait that is "most prominent" in this situation is obedience.<sup>167</sup> As I stated in Chapter One, most of the subjects in Milgram's experiment were willing to obey the experimenter, and this was the case even when their duty to obey conflicted with their duty to be compassionate and refrain from harming an innocent person. Obedience "may not always be a virtue" Solomon argues, since it does not seem that a virtuous person would obey a command to do something cruel or unjust.<sup>168</sup> Unfortunately, however, what Milgram's experiment is a reminder of is the painful lesson that obedience is often a much stronger character trait than compassion, as compassion is "more often praised than practiced".<sup>169</sup>

### **Section 3.2.5 The Anti-Behaviorist Reply**

I will now consider the anti-behaviorist reply. Those who use this argument claim that the data which informs situationism is derived from inadequate tests of character traits, because this data is only derived from observations of behavior. However, no one in the virtue ethical tradition claims that character traits are mere behavioral dispositions; rather, they have certain cognitive and emotional components as well. Therefore, this data cannot tell us who has certain character traits and who lacks them. Those who have employed various forms of this argument include Julia Annas, Nafiska

Athanassoulis, Rachana Kamtekar, Kristján Kristjánsson, Daniel Russell, Nancy Snow, Christine Swanton and Jonathan Webber.<sup>170</sup>

Most of the time, those who employ the anti-behaviorist argument merely claim that the experimental evidence which informs situationism is insufficient to undermine belief in the widespread existence of robust character traits.<sup>171</sup> However, since failing to provide empirical evidence for the non-existence of robust character traits does not thereby provide one with empirical evidence for their existence, Russell and Snow have added a further premise to this argument. They have claimed that the empirical evidence for the existence of CAPS traits provides the virtue ethicist with just the data she has been looking for in order to make her claims about robust character traits empirically adequate. This is due to the fact that CAPS traits are personality traits, according to Mischel, and character traits are just a subset of personality traits.<sup>172</sup> As I have already stated, however, CAPS traits cannot be detected by only observing outward behavior and failing to consider how the moral agent construes the situations in which she finds herself.

Prima facie, it may appear that the anti-behaviorist reply is an unconvincing argument to use against situationists for the following reason. While it is clear that few people in the virtue ethical tradition claims that virtuous behavior is a sufficient condition for having certain character traits, they usually claim that it is at least a necessary condition. Aristotle, for example, claims that a virtuous person would never do things that are hurtful or mean.<sup>173</sup> Thus, while knowing that a Ned behaves in a

virtuous manner does not necessarily entail that Ned has a certain virtue, knowing that Ned behaves in a vicious manner seems to entail that Ned is not virtuous. If one watches Ned walk out of a laboratory in which a sadistic experimenter is ordering him to apply lethal shocks to an innocent person, one does not know if Ned did this out of compassion or out of more selfish motives. (Ned, for example, might recognize the innocent person is a prospective employer who might offer him a job and he therefore doesn't wish to anger him.) If, on the other hand, one watches Ned apply lethal shocks to this innocent person, while one may not know whether Ned applied these shocks reluctantly or enthusiastically, one at least knows enough to know that Ned is not fully virtuous. For these reasons, it may seem absurd to try and defend Ned under such circumstances by claiming that outward behavior is only one component of virtue.

This is too quick, however. Those who employ the anti-behaviorist reply are usually willing to concede that people whose outward behavior is vicious generally lack complete virtue, but they would usually argue that this outward behavior tells us nothing about the *extent* to which those who behave in this manner lack virtue. This is critical for those who advance the anti-behaviorist reply, because they generally agree with those who advance the empirical modesty reply in claiming that virtue is not an all-or-nothing phenomenon, but can instead be instantiated imperfectly to varying degrees. I will now consider how this point of agreement informs the anti-behaviorist reply by looking at the particular way in which Athanassoulis advances this reply.

Athanassoulis interprets Aristotle to claim that the overt behavior of an incontinent agent is the same as a vicious agent, and the overt behavior of continent agent is the same as a virtuous agent. However, the former are different in the following way. Unlike the vicious agent, the incontinent agent is able to correctly judge what virtue requires, but “he has lost the battle between desire and reason.”<sup>174</sup> He therefore does not do what virtue requires, according to Athanassoulis’ reading of Aristotle in NE Book VII. Moreover, the continent agent is able to act as the virtuous agent acts, but in acting as the virtuous agent, the continent agent is acting contrary to his desires, while the virtuous agent wants to do what he judges to be virtuous. It follows from these considerations that when we observe someone performing a virtuous act, we do not know enough about his judgment and desire to know if he does this act as a continent agent or a truly virtuous agent, and when we observe someone performing a vicious act, we do not know enough about his judgment and desire to know if he performs it as an incontinent agent or as a truly vicious agent.

To see why these kinds of considerations about outward behavior are so critical for those who use the anti-behaviorist reply, it is important to remember one of the central theses of situationism. Situationists such as Doris and Harman claim that the experimental data from social-psychology makes claims about global character traits empirically inadequate, which, in turn, makes the virtue ethical tradition untenable. What this data shows, the situationist asserts, is that very few people have robust character traits if anyone has them at all. Anyone who understands these claims is in a

position understand the anti-behaviorist reply to these claims, which I will now summarize.

Along with those who employ the empirical modesty reply, those who employ the anti-behaviorist reply remind the situationist that insofar as the data from experimental social psychology leads to the inference that very few people instantiate virtues perfectly, it is uninteresting as far as the virtue ethicist is concerned. Any virtue ethicist who claims that most people fully instantiate the virtues is not an Aristotelian virtue ethicist, since Aristotle agreed that very few people fully instantiate the virtues. Most people, Aristotle claimed, are either vicious, incontinent or continent. Those who are incontinent are morally better than those who are vicious, since unlike the vicious the incontinent at least have the right judgments. Those who are continent are morally better than those who are incontinent since they act on their correct judgments, and those who are truly virtuous are better than anyone else since they not only have the appropriate behavior and judgments, but the appropriate desires as well.

Unlike those who only use the empirical modesty reply, however, those who advance the anti-behaviorist reply also add the following claim to their argument. One cannot make a fair judgment about the empirical adequacy of these Aristotelian claims until one has tested the general population's dispositions to have certain affects and cognitions in addition to observing their outward behavior. The data from the kinds of social psychological experiments which we have been considering, however, do not test

affects and cognitions. Rather, they are based on observations of outward behavior alone, or so those who employ this reply argue.

### **Section 3.2.5 The Out-Sourcing Reply**

In some ways those who use the out-sourcing reply could not be more different from those who employ the anti-behaviorist strategy reply toward the situationist. While the anti-behaviorists seek to undermine the situationist critique of virtue ethics by focusing on the components of virtue other than overt behavior, those who use the outsourcing strategy do the exact opposite. Those who use this reply focus exclusively on providing an account of normative ethics according to which certain patterns of behavior are defined as virtues, whatever the psychological states or dispositions that underwrite these patterns turn out to be. Russell is responsible for calling this the “out-sourcing” strategy, since those who use this strategy “out-source” the work of explaining the types of psychological attributes that would determine virtuous behavior to social and personality psychologists.<sup>175</sup>

#### *The Out-Sourcing Reply for Driver*

Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to consider the merits of moral theories that are not virtue theories, for the sake of clarity, it should be noted that one need not be a virtue ethicist in order to employ the out-sourcing strategy. One could employ this strategy in any moral theory that has an account of virtue, so long as one’s account is open to the possibility that there could be any number of psychological explanations of virtuous behavior. For example, one could provide an account of virtue

as a disposition that consistently produces good consequences and remain open to the possibility that some agents might produce good consequences with bad intentions, might act out of a neurotic obsession for producing good consequences and so forth. Moreover, such a disposition need not produce good consequences every time the agent acts from it, but with all else being equal, it would need to produce good consequences in most cases. For example, one could have a disposition to act industriously, and such a disposition could sometimes produce bad consequences. One's industriousness could conceivably cause one to work so hard that one is too exhausted to spend quality time with one's family when one is not working, and one's spouse and children may suffer as a result of this disposition, at least to some extent. However, such industriousness could also produce better consequences for one's family and one's society than the contrary disposition of laziness, and would therefore be a virtue, according to this account.

Julia Driver employs a strategy that is similar to the one I have just described as she argues that Huckleberry Finn is a virtuous agent, even though he acted with bad intentions in stealing the slave Jim away from his owner, Miss Watson.<sup>176</sup> However, since a disposition to work against the unjust institution of slavery had better historical consequences than a disposition to preserve and strengthen this institution, it follows for Driver that Huck Finn acted out of virtue with respect to Jim, regardless of the nature of his subjective mental states. As Driver explains:



Huck, though lacking a correct conception of the good, was still acting in accordance with the correct conception of the good. This was what made him, in fact, a good person. In order to be virtuous, in other words, one need not know that what one is doing is right. One simply has to have a disposition such that one does what is good or right.<sup>177</sup>

### *The Out-Sourcing Reply for Thomson*

Considering Driver's view will now help clarify the way in which virtue ethicists employ the out-sourcing strategy, according to the definition of virtue ethics which I gave in Chapter One. For an example of such a virtue ethicist, we will turn to Judith Thomson and consider the way in which she employs this strategy. Thomson argues that acts are virtuous in a way that is metaphysically prior, and agents are virtuous in a way that is metaphysically secondary.<sup>178</sup> According to Thomson, we should therefore define virtues such as justice as the disposition to perform just acts, or the virtue of courage as the disposition to perform courageous acts, and so forth.

Thomson rejects Driver's definition of virtues as dispositions to produce what are, on balance, good consequences. Her concern is that such a definition is incoherent, since goodness is not a property. For Thomson, nothing is good *simpliciter*; rather, things are always good in a way, or good for some purpose. But even though virtues are not dispositions to produce good consequences, Thomson at least grants that it is "good for us" that people are disposed to do just acts, generous acts, and so forth.<sup>179</sup>

Although Thomson and Driver clearly disagree about how virtues should be defined, it is clear that they at least agree on the following issue. An agent is virtuous if she is disposed to produce acts with a positive moral valence, whatever the psychological attributes are that such an agent might turn out to have. Those who use this outsourcing strategy reply to Doris and Harman by claiming that if globalism turns out to be empirically inadequate, then so much worse for globalism. Normative ethicists ought to focus on the task of providing an account of moral behavior that is normatively adequate, and if this behavior turns out to be determined more by situations and local traits than by global traits, then this need not concern anyone other than the social and personality psychologist.

## **Conclusion**

I will now summarize the findings of this chapter. I began this chapter by considering some of the various social psychological replies to situationism, which concern skepticism about the existence of robust personality traits. This set of replies make the following claims. (1) Some of the data that informs situationism is unreliable as it comes from methodologically unsound experiments. (2) Some of this data that informs situationism is untrustworthy as it comes from experiments that either have never been repeated, or which have been repeated with results that are highly inconsistent with the original experiments. (3) Reports of speciously low mean correlation coefficients for cross-situational personality traits in some of the experiments that inform situationism would have reported higher mean correlation

coefficients had these experiments included more observations of cross-situational behavior. (4) Reports of speciously low mean correlation coefficients for cross-situational personality traits are of only limited relevance for the social psychologist, since these low mean correlation coefficients are only derived from one kind of method for measuring the existence of these traits, and do not use another method which has sometimes resulted in significantly higher mean correlation coefficients. I named these respective replies the methodological reply, the outlier reply, the aggregation reply, and the idiographic reply.

In the second section of this chapter, I considered ethical replies to situationism which make the following claims. (5) For one reason or another, it is possible to develop either socially sustained character traits or even robust character traits, although the social psychological data which informs situationism raises serious challenges for the latter. (6) The social psychological data which informs situationism raises serious challenges for the possibility of having the virtues, although situationists overestimate the extent to which this challenge is so serious. (7) Although the data from social psychology would make a certain form of virtue ethics untenable, no serious virtue ethicist defends this form of virtue ethics. (8) Situationists misconstrue the data from many of the social psychological experiments that inform their thesis. These experiments do not show that people generally lack robust character traits; rather they only show that people either generally lack certain virtues, or that one cannot act in accordance with one virtue without sometimes acting contrary to another virtue. (9) The data from social psychology that informs situationism is of little relevance to the

virtue ethicist, since this data is only based on observations of behavior, and behavior is just one component of the virtues. (10) Virtue ethics ought to be reconstructed as a theory of dispositions to perform consistently virtuous acts. In accordance with such a theory, if a disposition to perform certain acts turns out not to be a component of traditional virtues which also include a disposition to have consistent cognitive and affective states, then this is only a problem for personality and social psychologists. I named these respective replies the bullet-biting reply, the overestimation reply, the empirical modesty reply, the conflict reply, the anti-behaviorist reply and the out-sourcing reply.

## **Chapter 4 Virtues as Ordinary Habits**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I state why each of the replies to situationism that I reconstructed in Chapter Three are unconvincing and then provide what I argue is a convincing reply to situationism. In this reply, I argue that it is possible to formulate a conception of virtues which is both empirically and normatively adequate if such a theory identifies virtues as ordinary habits. I proceed as follows. In Section One, I state what I believe are the fundamental problems with each of the replies to situationism. In Section Two, I then state how my account of virtues as ordinary habits succeeds where other replies to situationism have failed.

### **Section 4.1 The Inadequacy of All Other Replies to Situationism**

From the last chapter, it should be clear that the kinds of arguments which have been advanced against situationism can be classified into three basic argumentative strategies, namely the combative strategy, the avoidance strategy and the reconstruction strategy. Those who use the combative strategy are willing to concede little or nothing to the situationist. Accordingly, they either argue that the studies which are used to support situationism (hereafter *the situationist studies*) rely on an unsound methodology, that situationists have misinterpreted the data from these studies, or that

a sufficient number of other studies make a convincing case for the empirical adequacy of virtue ethics. Those who use the avoidance strategy usually argue that while the situationist studies create difficulties for a particular thesis about virtue, this thesis has little to do with any form of virtue ethics. Thus, rather than attacking virtue ethics, Doris and Harman only attack a straw man. Finally, those who use the reconstruction strategy generally argue that while Doris and Harman raise enough worries about the empirical adequacy of globalist virtue ethics to warrant a rejection of it, it is possible to reconstruct virtue ethics in a way that withstands their criticisms.

#### **Section 4.1.1 The Combative Strategy**

In Chapter Three, I stated that those who use the combative strategy in their reply to situationism usually make one of three arguments. They either argue that the situationist studies rely on an unsound methodology, that situationists have misinterpreted the data from these studies, or that a sufficient number of other studies make a convincing case for the empirical adequacy of virtue ethics. I will now argue that each of these replies is inadequate as a rejoinder to situationism as I consider them in turn.

##### **Section 4.1.1.1 Situationists Rely on Experiments with an Unsound Methodology**

In Chapter Three, I reconstructed some of the methodological doubts which could be raised about the situationist studies. These doubts were based on worries about such matters as the sample sizes used in some of the situationist studies, the use of statistical outliers, and the experimental and mundane realism of the studies. In what follows,

however, we shall see that there are two difficulties with formulating any reply to situationism around such worries. The first difficulty is that while it is likely that some studies should be set aside due to the use of an unsound methodology it seems unlikely that all of them should be set aside. The second difficulty is that some of these complaints do not even give us a sufficient reason to set aside a single experiment.

### *The First Difficulty*

To see why I claim that it seems unlikely that all of the situationist studies should be set aside, let me reconsider some of the complaints I considered in the last chapter concerning three experiments in particular, namely Isen and Levin's Dime Experiment, Hartshorne and May's experiment on honesty and Milgram's obedience experiment. In the last chapter, I stated that Christian Miller complains that Isen and Levin's experiment has never been replicated with identical conditions to the original experiment. According to Miller, one should therefore "exercise a great deal of care" before drawing any conclusions about character from experiments like this.<sup>180</sup> Miller is right about observing caution before drawing any conclusions from particular social psychological experiments, particularly ones which have never been replicated. At the same time, however, before dismissing Isen and Levin's data, one should recognize that there are hundreds of similar experiments that will need to be explained away which also seem to indicate that insignificant stimuli affects helping behavior. Among these are studies which suggest that noise levels, music, aromas and weather all affect helping behavior in significant ways.<sup>181</sup>

With respect to Hartshorne and May's experiment, in Chapter Three I stated that Kamtekar worries that this study about honesty is irrelevant for drawing conclusions about character since all of the subjects in this study were children. Kamtekar seems to be concerned that unless one has sufficient reason to believe that the average child is generally as morally developed as the average adult, one simply cannot draw inferences about the character of adults from such studies.<sup>182</sup> However, other experiments have been conducted which closely resembled Hartshorne and May's study original study except for the fact that the subjects were all adults. Among these are G. Dudycha's 1936 study of punctuality among 307 college students and Mischel and Peake's 1982 study of conscientiousness and friendliness among 63 college students. Both studies resulted in mean cross-situational correlations for their respective traits that were even lower than Hartshorne and May's .23 for honesty.<sup>183</sup>

Finally, I stated that Patten raises certain worries about the experimental realism of Milgram's experiment. Patten claims that the best explanation of why so many subjects in this experiment behaved so brutally in 'shocking' the confederate was because they knew that the shocks were fake. Even if Patten is right about this, however, it is worth noting that not all permutations of Milgram's original experiment involved fake shocks. One other such experiment involved administering actual shocks on a puppy in which 77 percent of subjects were fully obedient.<sup>184</sup>

It should be clear from reconsidering some of the complaints about the situationist studies that most of these complaints do very little to undermine situationism. The



problem with such complaints is that situationism is supported by such a large body of empirical data that it will remain well supported even if one, two, or even several situationist studies should be set aside. We have seen how this large body of data makes it difficult to take worries about three particular experiments seriously, and it seems reasonable to conclude that this body of data could be used to undermine any complaint about a single social psychological experiment.

### *The Second Difficulty*

I will now provide my reasons for claiming that many of the methodological complaints I considered in the last chapter do not even give us a sufficient reason to set aside a single experiment. Among these are the complaints we considered in the last chapter about the experimental and mundane realism of many of the situationist studies. Complaints about the former concern the issue of whether some of the situationist experiments were realistic enough to be taken seriously by the experimental subjects, and complaints about the latter concern the issue of whether or not the situation of the experiment is one which the subjects would be likely to encounter in the course of a normal life.<sup>185</sup>

### *Experimental Realism*

To see how this difficulty applies to complaints about experimental realism, we will consider the complaint that Milgram's Obedience experiment lacks a sufficient degree of experimental realism. S. Patten claims that most of the subjects of Milgram's study were not fooled by the experimental cover story, despite sweating, trembling displaying

other signs of nervousness. According to Patten, these physical signs of distress are consistent with believing that one is administering fake shocks. The subjects of this experiment could have believed that the shocks were fake, Patten argues, but they displayed these signs of physical distress because they were not completely convinced that they were fake.

Patten's argument is clearly an attempt to explain how such a surprising number of Milgram's subjects could have acted so viciously without relying on the explanation that situational variables caused such vicious behavior. According to such an attempt, there is no vicious behavior to be explained, since there is nothing vicious about administering shocks the authenticity of which one doubts. Doris considers this, but argues that even if the subjects suspected that there was a "1 in 10" chance that the shocks were real, it was still morally inexcusable for the subjects to continue to apply these 'shocks' to the confederate.<sup>186</sup>

Regardless of whether Doris is correct about how morally blameworthy suspicious subjects would have been in Milgram's experiment, it seems that we should have little reason to believe Patten's hypothesis for the following reason. Not only was it common for Milgram's subjects to display signs of nervousness during the experiment, but it was even common for them to claim that they believed the experimental cover story in a follow up questionnaire.<sup>187</sup> It seems that both these signs of nervousness and these responses on the questionnaires are jointly sufficient to raise serious doubts about Patten's hypothesis, even if neither of them is sufficient alone. It seems possible that a

given subject could state that he was convinced that the shocks in the Milgram experiment were authentic when he actually believed they were fake. It also seems possible that a given subject could stutter, tremble and sweat even while believing that the shocks were fake. But it simply seems too coincidental to imagine that Milgram's subjects could have done both of these things while believing that the experiment was a hoax. Therefore Doris seems right to find Patten's hypothesis unconvincing.

### *Mundane Realism*

This second difficulty applies to complaints about the mundane realism of some of the situationist experiments in the following way. In Chapter Three, I considered how Montmarquet raises worries about mundane realism by arguing that in order to know whether what a subject is observed to do in an experiment tells us enough to make an inference about her character, one first needs to know whether the situation of the experiment is one which the subject would be likely to find herself in. Since many of the situationist experiments do not present the experimental subjects with such situations, Montmarquet is skeptical that situationists should be drawing any conclusions about character traits from them.

Montmarquet is skeptical that Milgram's Obedience experiment has a sufficient degree of mundane realism to be informative about any agent's character traits. Knowing that an agent would apply dangerous shocks to an innocent person is certainly interesting and even horrifying, but Montmarquet argues that if unless an agent is likely to find herself in an environment with shock generators and laboratories, then any

inferences one could make about whether she is compassionate would be unjustified. He therefore thinks that since the situation of Milgram's Obedience experiment is so unusual, anything it could tell us about cross-situational character traits is of limited value.

It seems to me that Montmarquet's criticism of situationism faces the following difficulty. Montmarquet seems to be worried that one cannot make inferences about what an agent will typically do based on what she does in a particular situation. But this will only be relevant to the debate about whether agents have trans-situational character traits if the fact that an agent has typical behaviors can best be explained by trans-situational character traits. However, it is not clear that the existence of such traits would be necessary to explain the existence of a set of "typical" behaviors. Doris does not deny that people are generally observed to have typical ways of acting in their daily routines, but he does not think that such ways of acting must be explained by cross-situational character traits. As Doris argues, this consistent behavior could easily be explained by the fact that people only have sets of narrow character traits, and they spend most of their time in a rather narrow range of situations.<sup>188</sup>

It is of course true that the situationist studies only provide us with limited information about what the subjects in these studies are like. From the fact that someone would agree to apply dangerous shocks to an innocent person we cannot infer anything about how they treat their spouse, neighbors, children, coworkers and so forth. But no situationist denies that each person is different, or that we can learn more

about these differences from knowing them intimately than by watching how they behave in a single experiment. What they deny, rather, is that we would learn anything about the differences among people which could be best explained by the existence of trans-situational character traits.<sup>189</sup> Thus, let us grant that only someone who knows Phil intimately will know that Phil spends most of his time being nice to his wife, children and neighbors and that no one who has only observed Phil in a single experiment knows Phil intimately. Still, it does not follow that Phil's "typical" kindness is best explained by some cross-situational trait of kindness. Therefore, while Montmarquet is right to note that we can learn more information about how someone typically behaves by seeing them in a representative situation than in an unusual situation, this is beside the point. What matters is not how much information we could glean from a social psychological experiment, but what kind of information we could glean.

#### **Section 4.1.1.2 There is Sufficient Empirical Evidence for the Existence of Robust Character Traits**

In Chapter Three, I stated that those replies which claim that some sort of evidence for the widespread instantiation of virtues include the aggregation reply, the CAPS reply and the factitious virtues reply. I will now argue that none of these attempts to make virtue ethics empirically adequate will also succeed in making virtue ethics normatively adequate. However, this does not mean that I deny that there is sufficient empirical evidence for the existence of robust character traits. In Section 4.2, I will in fact argue

that one can find such evidence when one looks to social psychological studies on habit formation. Thus, the objections I am now raising about the attempts to find empirical evidence for robust character traits that I considered in Chapter Three are not part of a more general pessimism about such attempts. I am simply unconvinced by these specific attempts.

### *The Aggregation Reply*

As I stated in Chapter Three, the Aggregation reply refers to Epstein's claim that observation of a set of subjects that results in low mean correlation coefficients for trans-situationally consistent behavior are usually the wrong kinds of observations for making inferences about robust personality traits. In order to properly measure the existence of robust personality traits, one needs to observe cross-situational behavior over multiple trials. When one does this, one will find that although one may not be able to predict what a given subject will do in any single situation, one will be able to predict how much more likely a given subject is to act a certain way over multiple situations than another subject. Thus, according to Epstein, being able to say what someone is like *in general* is perfectly consistent with not being able to predict what she will do in a given situation.

Although Epstein's thesis about aggregated traits concerns personality traits and not character traits, if character traits are just personality traits with a moral valence, then Epstein's thesis could give virtue ethicists reason to hope that most people have robust character traits. The hope would be that if it is psychologically possible for agents

to have cross-situational personality traits of at least some kind, then it is psychologically possible for agents to have some kind of cross-situational character traits such as honesty, generosity, compassion as well as anything else which might be a character trait.<sup>190</sup>

Doris has doubts about both the normative adequacy of a virtue theory that would prescribe the development of aggregated traits, since he thinks such traits have little to do with the kinds of robust character traits that could serve as a solid foundation for a normative ethical theory. Rather, it represents a “scaling-back” of this conception into a more “tepid” one that can no longer fuel “our loves and hates”.<sup>191</sup> Thus, Doris is willing to grant the globalist a victory with aggregated traits, but he considers it a rather hollow victory.

Doris’ argument seems to be a fair one. If Aristotle called virtue *arête* or excellence, then it would seem that the virtuous person must be a moral exemplar, not someone who is simply honest, compassionate and courageous a little more often than the average person. However, perhaps the aggregation reply can be used to support the modest thesis that only a few people strongly instantiate virtues such as justice, courage, compassion and so forth, and the rest of the population is in some state of moral development. The claim that most of the population is in some stage of moral development is consistent with it being hard to predict what they will do in any individual situation. But it is also consistent with it being easy to predict how they will be distinguished from each other in a large set of situations. Perhaps it is the case that only

those who are fully virtuous (vicious) will be those for whom we can safely predict what they will do in any virtue-relevant situation. But if this is how the aggregation reply is to be used, then it is an argument which supports the avoidance strategy which we will turn to in the next section. Furthermore, insofar as the aggregation reply is used to support the avoidance strategy, it will also inherit the problems with the avoidance strategy which we will also be considering.

### *The CAPS Reply*

Daniel Russell and Nancy Snow claim that we can find sufficient data to make virtue ethics empirically adequate if we turn to studies on CAPS traits. CAPS traits refer to personality traits within what Mischel calls a “cognitive-affective processing system”. According to Mischel, although subjects will often behave quite inconsistently across situations when one interprets those situations “nominally” or from the point of view a third-person observer, when one interprets such situations from the subject’s point of view, behavior is much more consistent.<sup>192</sup> Thus, suppose that I would ignore a distressed person when I am in a hurry but will help when I have time to spare. This would seem to be inconsistent behavior from the observer’s point of view, but it could be consistent from my point of view in the following way. When I am in a hurry, I may not interpret distressing situations as emergencies as readily as I will when I have time to spare. Whenever I perceive that a particular situation is an emergency, however, I will see myself as having a reason to help. Thus, since I will help in any situation that I perceive as an emergency, my behavior is consistent in one way, although it will appear



inconsistent from the point of view of someone who believes that a situation calls for helping behavior whenever it involves a distressed person.

One popular objection to identifying CAPS traits as virtues is that virtues should be responsive to actual moral reasons and not merely perceived moral reasons.<sup>193</sup> A virulent racist could perceive that all African Americans threaten his safety, but this perception would not justify treating all African Americans with hostility, nor would it make his unwarranted hostility any less vicious. A virtuous person would seem to be someone who not only knows that hostility is only an appropriate response to actual threats to one's safety, she can discern the difference between a true threat and an artificial one just as she can discern the difference between all real and artificial moral reasons for acting in particular ways.

Perhaps Snow and Russell would respond to this objection by asking how one could know that what an agent perceives to be a reason for acting in a certain way is not an actual reason for acting in a certain way. They may argue that any time one makes a judgment that a particular situation calls for acting according to some virtue, one is engaged in a particular interpretation of the objective features of the situation. In fact, to claim that any situation calls for a moral response is to interpret the situation according to a particular point of view, as an objective observer may not agree that a situation has any moral features at all.<sup>194</sup>

It is certainly the case the ability to make value-laden interpretations of situations is a necessary component of being virtuous. But it seems equally clear that at least some

of one's interpretations of situations are not virtuous ones when those interpretations are determined by non-moral variables. There would be nothing strange about a virtuous person noticing that a certain situation demands a compassionate response while those who do not value being compassionate do not interpret the situation in the same way. It would be strange, however, for a so-called virtuous person to only interpret a situation as calling for a compassionate response because it is sunny outside.

Unfortunately for Snow and Russell, much of the data from the situationist studies clearly seems to indicate that often moral judgments will be determined by non-situational variables. Thus, the problem with CAPS traits is not the problem that agents who instantiate these traits do not act consistently in some way. Nor is it the problem that judgments about the actual moral features of a situation must be judgments about the situation's objective features. The problem, rather, is that the non-moral features of a situation should not determine how an agent who instantiates a CAPS trait interprets the moral features of a situation if CAPS traits are to be consistent in any morally important way.

### *The Factitious Virtues Reply*

A third strategy for making virtue ethics empirically adequate comes in the form of a search for factitious virtues. Mark Alfano adopts this approach by claiming that while the situationist studies provide sufficient empirical evidence that most people do not instantiate Aristotelian virtues, there is also sufficient empirical evidence that most people will instantiate trans-situational character traits if they are persuaded that they

have such traits. Thus, under the right circumstances, trait attributions are self-fulfilling prophecies. If an agent believes those who tell her she has a certain character trait, her belief can actually make her have that character trait even if what she is told is false. Among the studies which support this claim include two studies in which it was found that an agents' charitable and helping behavior could be influenced by her beliefs about her own character. In the first study, (Jensen and Moore 1977), children who were told that they were charitable were found to donate more than children who were subjected to a program of moral persuasion. In the second study, children who performed some helpful action were either told that they were helpful people or that they had done something helpful. Afterward, those who were labeled with the helpful trait were found to donate 350 percent more than those whose actions were praised (Grusec and Redler 1980) but who were not given such a trait attribution.

While there may be a sufficient number of studies to support the existence of Alfano's factitious virtues, there are at least two reasons to worry about the normative adequacy of a theory that could be constructed around factitious virtues. First, there is no evidence that agents who have such factitious virtues will act out of virtuous reasons. Thus, someone who is factitiously virtuous in some way can be expected to act in ways that are consistent with having that virtue, but not necessarily for the reason that they value acting virtuously for its own sake. Rather, they will act virtuously because they value maintaining a certain conception of themselves.<sup>195</sup> Second, while the character traits that are supported by the situationist studies seem to be temporally stable without being trans-situationally consistent, factitious virtues seem to have the opposite

problem. While factitious virtues are trans-situationally consistent, there is no reason to think that they are temporal stable. If one's factitious virtues are grounded in their beliefs about themselves, then this will entail that they can change just as frequently as such beliefs can change.<sup>196</sup>

While Alfano grants that there are such problems with factitious virtues, he argues that one should not worry too much about these problems if instantiating a set of factitious virtues is as close as we can ever expect anyone to come to instantiating actual virtues.<sup>197</sup> I will grant his point. But in the next section of this chapter, I will argue that we can come a lot closer.

#### **Section 4.1.1.3 The Situationists Misinterpret the Data From Their Own Studies**

In Chapter Three, I stated that those who claim that situationism rests on a misreading of social psychological data generally claim that far from providing evidence for the non-instantiation of cross-situational character traits, the situationist studies neither provide evidence for or against the instantiation of global character traits. This is because the existence of character traits simply was not tested in these experiments. What was tested, rather, is how subjects would act when they experienced a conflict between the demands of two virtues. I will call this argument the conflict argument.

As I stated in Chapter Three, R. Kamtekar has a strong form of the conflict argument and Solomon has a weak form. Kamtekar's strong claim is that many of the social psychological experiments placed subjects in a moral dilemma in which they had to choose between two conflicting virtues and there was nothing which

the subjects could have done which would have been morally permissible. Solomon, on the other hand, allows that the subjects who appear to have acted wrongly in these experiments did act wrongly. However, they did not act wrongly because they failed to act in accordance with the demands of *any* virtue, they just failed to act in accordance with the demands of the most important virtue.

To see the difference between the strong and weak form of the conflict argument, it might be helpful to consider how these different arguments would likely be used to explain the results of a particular social psychological experiment. I will therefore turn to one of the many studies on bystander effects, namely a 1969 study by Latane and Rodin. In this study, an experimental confederate provided subjects with some questionnaires to complete, while she withdrew behind a curtain. Soon afterward, the subject(s) heard sounds which suggested that the confederate had just had a serious fall. The results of this experiment showed that subjects were much more likely to offer help when they waited alone than when they waited with an unresponsive confederate.<sup>198</sup>

Based on their differences, Kamtekar and Solomon would likely interpret the results of this study in the following ways. Kamtekar is likely to argue that no matter what the subjects did in this study, they would have acted contrary to a virtue. On one hand, if they behaved unresponsively they would have failed to display compassion, but on the other hand, if they had stopped working on their questionnaires, they would have acted contrary to their instructions and failed to be conscientious. Solomon, on the other hand, is likely to grant that an agent who is both fully compassionate and fully

conscientious would recognize that the demands of the former virtue override the demands of the latter virtue in this situation. However, it does not follow that those who failed to act compassionately in this situation are not at least conscientious.

Before turning to the problems with both forms of the conflict reply, I should begin by noting that the weak form of this reply is far more plausible than the strong form of this reply. The problem with the strong conflict reply is that while there can be little doubt that experiments such as Latane and Rodin do indeed pit the demands of two virtues against each other, it seems odd to insist that the demands of the two virtues in many of these experiments are equally important. In fact, of all the situationist experiments which seem designed to pit two virtues against each other, it is difficult to interpret *any* of them as pitting two equally important virtues against each other. For example, perhaps Milgram's Obedience Experiment, like Latane and Rodin, can also be interpreted as pitting the interests of compassion against the interests of conscientiousness. Since the subjects in this experiment had agreed to be paid volunteers in it, they clearly had a reason to participate in it until the bitter end. However, it is hard to see how their reasons for being conscientious were not outweighed by their reasons for being compassionate. Each of the subjects' reason for being compassionate and not applying painful shocks to an innocent person clearly seems to outweigh whatever reason they had to conscientiously follow through on their commitment to be a participant in the experiment.

The problem with both forms of the conflict reply, however, is that while it may be possible to interpret some of the situationist studies as creating a moral conflict for the

experimental subjects, it is difficult to interpret all of them as doing this. Thus, while the demands of conscientiousness could give one a moral reason to neglect the interests of compassion, it is difficult to see what moral reason one could have had to refuse to make change for a dollar, or to ignore a stranger in need of help in gathering up dropped papers. But this is just what one finds in experiments such as Baron (1997) and Isen and Levin (1972). In both studies, an experimental subject's mood was found to influence these kinds of helping behaviors even when the subjects did not appear to have any moral reasons not to be helpful.

This inability to explain all of the social psychological experiments that Doris and Harman cite need not be a lethal problem for the conflict reply. What it entails, however, is that those such as Solomon who advance the conflict reply will need to supplement it with an explanation of those experiments which do not seem designed to create a conflict between two virtues. Using the conflict reply alone, however, does not seem a promising strategy for making virtue ethics either empirically or normatively adequate and thus allowing it to withstand the situationist challenge.

#### **Section 4.1.2 The Avoidance Strategy**

In Chapter Three, I stated that the avoidance strategy has been employed in various ways by a number of critics of situationism.<sup>199</sup> Those who employ this strategy usually do so by providing a form of what Doris calls the "rarity" argument and combining it with a form of what I call the overt behavior argument.<sup>200</sup> I will reconstruct both

arguments separately and then state how they are normally combined. I will then argue that the avoidance strategy is untenable for a number of reasons.

According to those who employ the rarity argument, it would not be surprising if an extremely small percentage of moral agents ever become fully virtuous, since Aristotle never claimed that most people were fully virtuous.<sup>201</sup> Thus, insofar as situationism is an attack on the empirically ambitious claim that most people are virtuous, it is not an attack on virtue ethics in the Aristotelian tradition. Aristotelian virtue ethicists are committed to a much more empirically modest claim, and the data which Doris and Harman rely on to support their thesis is perfectly consistent with this thesis. Therefore, even though we can predict that only a few subjects in any given social psychological experiment will act virtuously when faced with various situational pressures, these results can easily be explained by the fact that an extremely small percentage of moral agents are fully virtuous.

Those who use the overt behavior argument claim that the data which informs situationism is derived from inadequate tests of character traits, because this data is only derived from observations of overt behavior. These tests are inadequate according to their argument, since virtues are normally conceived as having cognitive and emotional components and are not mere behavioral dispositions.<sup>202</sup> Thus, someone who has a virtue like compassion will not only be observed to do compassionate things, she will also do them for reasons of compassion, have compassionate emotions and perceive when a compassionate response is called for. However, none of these



perceptive, affective and cognitive components of virtue were tested in any study which could be used to support situationism simply because these components are not the kinds of things which can be observed. Therefore, this data cannot tell us who has certain character traits and who lacks them.

Those who employ the avoidance strategy combine the rarity argument with the overt behavior argument when they argue that not only is the data from the situationist studies consistent with the thesis that virtuous agents are rare, it is even consistent with the thesis that most people are in different stages of developing the virtues. According to this argument, if in a given social psychological experiment a few agents are found to act virtuously and the remainder act viciously, there are two equally good explanations of these results. One explanation, namely the situationist one, is that while people may generally instantiate local character traits, they do not instantiate cross-situational character traits at all. But since neither the cognitive nor the affective states of the subjects is tested, an equally good explanation of the data is that while each subject instantiates a trans-situational character trait, each of them may not have yet advanced to being fully virtuous. Among the many who act viciously, some may indeed be completely vicious and act on their desires and their distorted judgments about what is right, while others may be incontinent and have virtuous desires and judgments, but have yet to develop the habit of acting virtuously. Among the many who act virtuously, some may indeed be genuinely virtuous but others may only be in the stage of continence. The latter will be able to make reliable judgments about what the virtues

demand, and will consistently act in accordance with these demands, but they will lack virtuous desires.

Thus, for those who advance the avoidance strategy, the data from those situationist studies is consistent with two theses. On one hand, it is consistent with the claim that virtue is rare and that most or even all of the subjects in the study had robust character traits of some kind. On the other hand, it is also consistent with the thesis that people lack robust character traits altogether, but we cannot know which of these theses are true unless we observe the unobservable, namely the cognitive and affective states of the experimental subjects.

I will now turn to my complaints about the avoidance strategy. In light of much of the alarming data from social psychology, I think those who employ this strategy are right not to be deluded with the ambitious hope that any more than a small percentage of the population is fully virtuous. But it is one thing to claim that the data from social psychology is consistent with the existence of a small percentage of virtuous people, and it is quite another thing to insist that a small percentage of the population is virtuous without providing evidence for such a claim. My main worry about the avoidance strategy, therefore, is that those who employ this strategy do not provide the evidence required to support their claims. In a forthcoming argument in Section 4.2, I too will argue that there is an extremely small percentage of the population that instantiates one or more of the virtues, but there are two important differences between my claim and those who have used this strategy to date. First, I support my

claim with sufficient empirical evidence and second, I abandon the hope that the character traits which are identical to virtues and vices are the kind of global character traits of which Doris and Harman are skeptical. Not only is there a lack of experimental evidence to support such a hope, but there is even a lack of anecdotal evidence based on observations. As I stated in Chapter One, situationists argue that due to observational biases such as FAE and the confirmation bias, the judgments people make based on observations of character is not to be trusted.

I will now examine the empirical evidence, however, in order to provide support for my claim that there is not enough evidence to support the avoidance strategy. Such evidence comes from two types of studies, namely latitudinal studies which involve observing a subject's behavior in a single trial, and longitudinal studies which involve observing how a subject behaves over multiple trials. We will begin with the former.

In latitudinal studies such as Milgram's Obedience Experiment and Darley and Batson's Good Samaritan Experiment it is indeed the case that a few of the subjects in these experiments were observed to act in ways that are consistent with being virtuous. A few subjects in Milgram's experiment, for example, decided to quit the experiment before applying seemingly dangerous "shocks" to the experimental confederate. But the behavior of these subjects should not give any virtue ethicist much confidence that they instantiated the virtue of compassion. As Doris points out, refusing to apply dangerous shocks to an innocent person is what one would expect someone with ordinary standards of decency to do, not just what one would expect someone who is virtuous to

do.<sup>203</sup> Moreover, as I claimed in Chapter One, occasionally or even frequently failing to observe an agent harming an innocent person is extremely weak evidence that such an agent is compassionate.

Although one-off experiments such as Milgram and Darley and Batson's experiments could only provide extremely weak evidence for the existence of some virtuous agents, this need not entail that there could not be strong empirical support for the rarity argument. Longitudinal studies have the potential for providing stronger evidence for the existence of some virtuous agents for the rather obvious reason that longitudinal studies involve observing agents over more occasions. But unfortunately for those who employ the rarity argument, there is very little data from longitudinal studies which support the existence of virtuous agents, and the vast majority of longitudinal studies, such as Hartshorne and May, seem to provide strong evidence for the non-existence of virtuous agents.<sup>204</sup>

In fairness to those who employ the rarity argument, longitudinal studies such as Hartshorne and May have not found that every subject lacks the virtues if we are to take observations of trans-situationally inconsistent behavior as evidence for the non-existence of virtuous subjects. Hartshorne and May found that among 8000 subjects, the average trans-situational correlation of honest behaviors was only .23. However, this data is consistent with the possibility that some of these 8000 subjects were more honest than others. Data which reports on average behavior for a group is not necessarily data which states that everyone in the group behaved in the same way.<sup>205</sup>

This point is worth noting, but so far, there is virtually no evidence that large groups of subjects can be divided into sub-groups of trans-situationally consistent and trans-situationally inconsistent subjects for a given character trait. Most longitudinal studies which include attempts to divide subjects along such lines have failed to show that any sub-group is more trans-situationally consistent than any other sub-group. Bem and Allen's study on friendliness and conscientiousness is somewhat promising for those who hope that some people instantiate trans-situational character traits.<sup>206</sup> As Ross and Nisbett point out, however, Bem and Allen's study is so riddled with methodological problems it is hard to take their data seriously.<sup>207</sup>

Those who use the avoidance strategy will be right to point out that the empirical data I am citing is only data on observations of outward behavior and it is therefore of limited use. Specifically, it cannot be used to confirm the thesis that most people are not in some stage of developing virtues which have cognitive and affective components. But we should note that this overt behavior argument can also be used against those who employ the avoidance strategy. While it is true that observations of vicious outward behavior cannot tell us enough to distinguish the vicious agent from the incontinent agent, neither can observations of virtuous behavior alone allow us to distinguish the continent from the virtuous agent. Thus, even if some agents were observed to always act in accordance with the demands of some virtue, these observations alone would not give us sufficient evidence that they instantiate this virtue.

In addition to making an empirical claim, my biggest complaint about the avoidance strategy is that even if it turns out to be true that a small percentage of agents are virtuous, it is unclear how this claim alone provides a sufficient answer to the challenge of situationism. It is certainly better for virtue ethics if some people are virtuous than if no one is virtuous. But the problem that situationism raises for virtue ethics is not that too few people are virtuous. The problem, rather, is that virtue ethics seems to rely on a theory of moral psychology which lacks empirical support. This is not to deny that it is part of Doris' thesis that virtues, if they are instantiated at all, are rarely instantiated.<sup>208</sup> But the rarity of virtue is only relevant for Doris because it indicates that being virtuous may not be psychologically possible for the average agent.<sup>209</sup>

It is true that Aristotle himself claimed that complete virtue is a state that "the many" do not fully attain and it should be unsurprising to all but the most naïve that most human beings are morally imperfect. But the claim which the data from the situationist studies support is not just the uninteresting claim that most humans never attain moral perfection. The more interesting claim which these studies support is that under subtle situational pressures, most human beings are not even morally decent, while under other situational pressures, they can act heroically.

While such studies indeed show that human beings are morally imperfect, the more interesting question they raise is what theory about human psychology best explains their state of imperfection. What situationists argue is that a theory which explains their imperfection through global character traits is a bad theory, for the reasons I gave in

Chapter Two. A theory which has much more support from the situationist studies is one which explains their imperfection through the power of subtle situational pressures. Thus, for the situationist, it is not just that most people are morally imperfect; it is that the Aristotelian spectrum for describing their moral imperfection as virtuous, continent, incontinent and vicious is empirically inadequate.

### **Section 4.1.3 The Reconstruction Strategy**

Those who employ the reconstruction strategy are willing to concede almost every point to the situationist in the debate between situationism and globalist virtue ethics.<sup>210</sup> They are therefore prepared to accept the thesis that experimental social psychology has made globalist virtue ethics empirically inadequate. Moreover, they willingly make this concession without claiming that situationism is a critique of a mere straw man of virtue ethics as those who use the avoidance strategy insist. They are willing to grant that Doris and Harman have not misread the virtue ethical tradition and that their criticisms are devastating. However, they also maintain that it is possible to save the virtue ethical tradition by reconstructing it in light of Doris and Harman's critique. Those who employ this strategy have therefore attempted to save virtue ethics in three ways. The first way involves replacing global virtues with local virtues, the second way involves replacing global virtues with socially sustained virtues and the third way involves making virtuous acts instead of virtuous dispositions the most basic concept in virtue ethics.

### Section 4.1.3.1 Local virtues

Robert Adams attempts to reconstruct a virtue ethical theory using local virtues that are similar to Doris' fine grained traits such as compassion-at-work-on-sunny-days, or courage-while-sailing-in-rough-weather. Adams agrees with Doris that social psychology has made trans-situationally consistent virtues untenable, but he thinks that virtue ethics is no worse off for the loss of such virtues.

Adams claims that it is unreasonable to insist that virtues cannot be morally excellent even if they are fragmented into local dispositions which can be instantiated independently of each other.<sup>211</sup> He imagines, for example, that virtues such as courage could be subdivided into many excellent traits such as conscientious courage and teleological courage. Someone who has the former will be disposed to face serious risks for the sake of important commitments and someone who has the latter will be disposed to face serious risks for the sake of pursuing goods which she cares about. If it is possible to have one of these virtues without the other, and there is no reason to deny that they are both morally excellent, then according to Adams, it would seem that courage is not the name of a single virtue, but a label given to different traits that are responsive to different moral reasons.

I will now state what I think are certain difficulties with the theory of local traits. In a brilliant critique of this theory, Mark Alfano has argued that even if local traits have more empirical support than global traits, it is not clear that a virtue theory which relies on local traits has any explanatory advantage over a theory of global traits.<sup>212</sup> For



Alfano, this is because by relying on local traits, whatever advantage one gains in empirical adequacy one loses by giving up on the “access condition”. While I agree with Alfano’s critique, I will also argue that a theory of local traits enjoys no real advantage in terms of empirical adequacy over a theory of global traits. First, however, I will reconstruct Alfano’s argument by explaining what he means by the access condition and providing his reasons for why a theory of local traits cannot meet this condition.

For Alfano, a virtue theory meets the ‘access condition’ when it is possible to know what the virtues are. Any virtue theory which would prescribe the development of the virtues must allow that it is possible to know what the virtues are on pain of becoming normatively inadequate. Alfano argues, however, that a virtue theory which identifies the virtues with local traits seems unable to meet the access condition for two reasons. First, if such virtues were fine grained enough, it could be extremely difficult if not impossible to learn all their names. Instead of merely learning the names of several global traits such as generosity, courage, honesty and so forth, one could potentially need to learn the names of thousands of local traits such as “generosity-towards ones-mother” and “generosity-towards-one’s-father”. Secondly, even if it were possible to learn the names of perhaps thousands of local traits, Alfano also argues that a theory of local traits would seem to have difficulties in stating how the virtues are distinguished from one another.

To see how this second problem with the access condition applies to a theory of local traits, one should suppose that Joe has a disposition of being generous towards

both his mother and his father. In such a case, it would be unclear whether Joe has one, two, or even three virtues. Joe could have the single virtue of “generosity-toward-one’s-parents”, he could have the virtues of “generosity-toward-one’s-mother” and “generosity-toward-one’s-father”, or he could have all three. A theory of local virtues would need to tell us precisely how many virtues Joe has. But according to Alfano, providing such information will be a problem for the theory of local virtues, since unlike a theory of global virtues, a theory of local virtues does not define the virtues as dispositions to respond to moral reasons.<sup>213</sup> If generosity is a disposition to act on reasons for being generous, then Joe will be generous to the degree to which he is supposed to act for generous reasons. But if virtues are defined as dispositions to respond to moral reasons in particular situations, then in order to understand what such dispositions are, we will also need a definition of these particular situations. Otherwise, we will not know whether someone who is generous to both parents is generous in one, two, or three types of situations.

Alfano’s criticism of local virtues seems somewhat unfair to Adams, since Adams seems to think that local virtues can be dispositions to respond to moral reasons regardless of the situation.<sup>214</sup> These virtues are more local than global virtues such as courage and honesty, however, since Adams thinks that our moral reasons are more fragmented than the names of these global virtues would suggest. Thus, rather than having reasons to be honest, moral agents have reasons not to steal, not to cheat, not to lie and so forth, and rather than having reasons to be courageous, agents have reasons to be teleologically and conscientiously courageous.

The real problem with Adams' theory, however, is that it is unclear how it is any more empirically adequate than a globalist thesis. Adams may be right to claim that our moral reasons are highly fragmented and that only highly fragmented character traits have sufficient empirical support. But he provides no reason for thinking that the kinds of fragmented traits that agents are capable of having are at all responsive to these fragmented moral reasons. Someone who is only compassionate during sunny weather or when pleasant aromas are around does not seem have a disposition that is consistently responsive to her reasons for being compassionate, even if her reasons for being compassionate is a set of several types of loosely related moral reasons.

In light of these considerations, it seems that there is a dilemma facing any theory of local virtues. The dilemma is that either these local virtues are identified by their responsiveness to moral reasons or they are not. If they are so identified, then I have just argued that there is no reason to think they are any more empirically adequate than a theory of global virtues. But if they are not so identified, then as Alfano argues, then it will be unclear what makes a given disposition a single local virtue rather than two or even three virtues.

It might be thought that an inability to meet the access condition as Alfano describes it, is something that those who have a theory of local virtues should be willing to accept in exchange for having a theory which is empirically adequate. However, I will now argue that no theory of local virtues is any more empirically adequate than a theory of global virtues.

My claim that Doris and Adams' thesis about local traits may not be any more empirically adequate than a theory of global traits should not be confused with the claim that situationism does not have empirical support. I am willing to concede that situationism is well informed by empirical research in the field of social psychology. But the way social psychologists such as Mischel have influenced situationism does not concern the debate over whether agents have global or local character traits. Rather, they have influenced situationism with the thesis that behavior is often better explained by situational variables than by personality variables. Mischel would argue, for example, that if one should witness uniform behavior that involves almost everyone in a community staying indoors during an electrical storm, it should be clear that this uniform behavior is better explained by the properties of the situation than any personality traits of the community residents. As I stated in Chapter One, situations such as electrical storms are thus "powerful" situations since they generally causes uniformity of behavior regardless of the personality differences of those involved in the situation. Not every situation is as powerful as an electrical storm, however, and there are clearly situations in which behavior is better explained by personality factors than by situational factors. To understand this thesis, it would be helpful to quote Mischel at length:

Recognizing that the question 'Are persons or situations more important?' is misleading and unanswerable, one can turn to the more interesting issue: When are situations most likely to exert powerful effects, and, conversely, when are person variables likely to be most influential?...To the degree that the situation is

‘unstructured’ and each person expects that virtually any response is equally likely to be equally appropriate..the significance of individual differences will be greatest. Conversely, when everyone expects that only one response is appropriate..then individual differences become minimal and situational effects prepotent.<sup>215</sup>

Since Mischel’s thesis is not a thesis about personality differences but a thesis about the explanation of behavior, it should be clear that this thesis is consistent with any thesis about personality differences, including Doris and Adams’ thesis that personality differences are best explained by differences in local traits. What I am presently concerned with, however, is whether there is any reason to prefer the Doris/Adams thesis of local traits to the thesis that agents have global traits.

I don’t think there is any such reason. Doris seems to think that a theory of local traits such as caution-during-storms has the following explanatory advantage over a theory of global traits. Without the thesis that agents only instantiate local traits such as caution-during-storms we cannot explain why a given agent only acts cautiously when she finds herself in an electrical storm and recklessly in every other circumstance. Perhaps Doris is right to think that trans-situational traits like cautiousness and recklessness *simpliciter* are explanatorily impotent when it comes to these behavioral differences. But to explain behavior both in terms of the power of the situation and the putative “local” traits of the agent is to explain it twice and therefore to provide one more explanation than is needed. It is not necessary to claim that the reason people generally stay indoors during electrical storms is both because they have a local trait like

“caution-during-storms” and because they find themselves in a powerful situation. One of these explanations is enough, and adding local traits as an explanation seems to overdetermine human behavior.

The skepticism I am putting forth about the existence of “local” character trait does not entail that social psychology does not have troubling findings for a globalist theory of virtue ethics. If it can be expected that most people will behave cruelly in such situations as the Milgram experiment, then this will entail that whatever trait of compassion most people have is not strong enough to guide their behavior in powerful situations such as Milgram’s laboratory. This will certainly be bad news for those virtue ethicists who prescribe the instantiation of global virtues. But I see no need to claim that those who act compassionately in weak situations and cruelly in powerful situations instantiate two different kinds of local traits. They may just instantiate a single global character trait to a lesser degree than those who are consistently compassionate across compassion eliciting situations of all degrees of strength.

#### **Section 4.1.3.2 Socially Sustained Virtues**

Those who prescribe socially sustained virtues claim that since globalist virtue ethics is empirically inadequate, virtue ethics should turn to the task of prescribing virtues which are more empirically modest. These empirically modest virtues are virtues which can only be maintained with the right kinds of social pressures or through seeking out situations which are conducive to virtuous behavior and avoiding those situations which are conducive to vicious behavior.<sup>216</sup>

Insofar as those who prescribe socially sustained virtues prescribe exercising caution about the kinds of situations an agent involves herself in, I think that they prescribe something that even the most empirically ambitious virtue ethicist can accept. If someone has both a good reason to believe that they are imperfectly virtuous with respect to the virtue  $\phi$  and a good reason to believe that being in situation  $\psi$  will cause her to act contrary to  $\phi$ , then it seems undeniable that she has a good reason to avoid  $\psi$ . Unfortunately for those who prescribe developing socially sustained virtues, the data from social psychology suggests that it may be unrealistic to hope that one can spend an entire lifetime only involving oneself in situations that are conducive to virtuous behavior.<sup>217</sup> But insofar as it may be possible to avoid at least those situations which are especially conducive to vicious behavior and to seek out those which are especially conducive to virtuous behavior, caution about where one goes and with whom one associates seems called for.

But while any moral agent would seem wise to exercise caution with respect to where she goes and with whom she associates, I now argue that this strategy alone cannot provide us with a convincing answer to the situationist. In order to introduce my argument, let me first grant that if one knows that one is likely to act viciously in certain situations and it is possible to avoid those situations without sacrificing anything of moral importance, then one ought to avoid those situations. The problem with this strategy, however, is as follows. If an agent knows that he is inclined to act viciously in  $\phi$ , even if she can easily avoid  $\phi$ , then how she is inclined to act in  $\phi$  should either matter to her or it should not matter to her. If it should matter to her, then she doesn't

just have a reason to avoid  $\phi$ , she has a reason to change how she would act in  $\phi$ . On the other hand, if how she would act in  $\phi$  should not matter to her, then it is unclear that she would necessarily have a reason for avoiding  $\phi$ .

Perhaps one can better consider the problem with socially sustained virtues by using the following example. Suppose that Bob knows that he would be unfaithful to his spouse if he were to set foot inside a brothel. One can grant that knowing this fact about himself gives Bob a good reason to avoid brothels if he can easily do so without sacrificing something of moral importance. But even if Bob has an all-things-considered reason to avoid brothels for the rest of his life, it doesn't seem clear that Bob should necessarily accept this unpleasant fact about himself with an attitude of moral indifference if he is the kind of person who values the virtue of fidelity. So, in addition to having a reason to avoid brothels for the rest of his life, Bob also has a reason to change who he is in brothels. Bob, of course, may not have enough of a reason to change who he is in brothels to engage in the kind of morally risky behavior that might be involved in undergoing such a change. If one is to suppose that in order to change who he is in brothels Bob must go into them on occasion, then this will mean that Bob will need to put himself in morally dangerous circumstances in order to change who he is in brothels. But it is one thing to say that Bob has an all-things-considered reason not to try and change who he is in brothels and Bob has *no reason at all* to try and change who he is in brothels.



What seems to follow from these considerations about Bob is that if one has moral reasons for being virtuous in any situation, then one has moral reasons to care about how one would act in any situation and therefore one has a reason to try and develop trans-situational virtues. But, for the sake of argument, let us now suppose it does not matter that someone like Bob will be unfaithful to his spouse in brothels if he can easily avoid being in brothels for the rest of his life. If it does not matter how Bob would behave in brothels, then it is unclear that Bob necessarily has a reason to avoid them in the first place.

To say that an agent such as Bob does not necessarily have a good reason to avoid situations in which it does not matter how he would act in those situations does not entail that an agent *may* not have such a good reason. If the only thing that matters morally are the good or bad consequences of an agent's actions, for example, then it may not matter that an agent's actions would have a bad outcome in a particular situation if she can easily avoid that situation. But to assume that all of our moral reasons concern the good or bad outcomes of an agent's actions is to beg the question against a virtue ethical theory such as the kind I provided in Chapter One. If an agent cares about being virtuous, then she doesn't just have reasons to ensure that others are treated justly, compassionately and faithfully, she also has reasons to be an agent who is just, compassionate, faithful and so forth. Therefore, she will have reasons to care about how she would act in a situation even if she can ensure that good consequences will always result by avoiding such a situation.

In light of these considerations, it seems that the problem with socially sustained virtues is as follows. An agent may have an overriding reason to avoid certain situations that are conducive to vicious behavior, but this claim is unproblematic. What those who prescribe socially sustained virtues need to explain, however, is whether those situations which one can avoid are still within the space of our moral concerns. If they are within this space, then it seems that one has a good reason to care about how one would act in those situations, and the socially sustained strategy will be inadequate as an answer to the situationist. If they are not within this space, on the other hand, then it is unclear socially sustained virtues are necessary at all.

#### **Section 4.1.3.3 Virtuous Acts**

The strategy of making virtuous acts the most basic concept in ethics would involve constructing a theory such as Judith Jarvis Thomson's, in which a given virtue *v* is defined as dispositions to perform *v* type acts.<sup>218</sup> Such a theory would change the direction of fit between virtues and virtuous acts in the following way. Rather than deriving the concept of a virtuous act from the more basic concept of a virtuous disposition, such a theory would derive the concept of a virtuous disposition from the more basic concept of a virtuous act.<sup>219</sup> Thus, courage would be defined as a disposition to do courageous acts, justice would be defined as a disposition to do just acts and so forth.

A theory of which prescribes doing virtuous acts instead of developing virtuous dispositions might appear to have a greater chance of being empirically adequate than

the latter since the data from social psychology suggests that instantiating global virtues might be psychologically impossible for most people. Unfortunately, however, I think the hope that a theory of virtuous acts might be more empirically adequate quickly disappears once we take a closer look at the empirical data which is so problematic for virtuous dispositions.

A theory of virtuous acts might withstand the challenge of situationism if most people were capable of acting virtuously but are incapable of having virtuous psychological states. But this is not what most of the data from the situationist studies show. Most of the data from the situationist studies raises doubts about agents having virtuous psychological states precisely because agents are so often found to *act* in ways that are inconsistent with being virtuous by shocking innocent people, ignoring distressed strangers, failing to offer help, and so forth. Thus, there are good reasons to doubt that most people are virtuous not because social psychological data suggests that they lack virtuous desires, or that they fail to make virtuous judgments. Rather, there are good reasons to doubt that people are virtuous precisely because they fail to consistently perform virtuous acts.

Fortunately for the virtuous acts theorist, none of situationist studies suggest that any agent is incapable of performing virtuous acts. Furthermore, as I stated in Chapter One, there is even data which suggests that almost anyone will act in a supererogatory manner when they are in the right kinds of situations. What is clear from the situationist studies, however, is that agents seem incapable of acting virtuously whenever they have

a reason to act virtuously, and this is certain to be a problem for the empirical adequacy of any theory of virtuous acts. If *ought* implies *can* and we have no reason to believe that an agent can do what a given theory says she ought to do at least *some* of the time, then it seems that such a theory is still empirically inadequate.

## **Section 4.2 An Empirically and Normatively Adequate Reply to Situationism**

### **Section 4.2.1 Introduction**

Before providing my own reply to the situationist challenge, it seems that it might be helpful to begin by asking what would be needed to have a convincing reply to the situationist. It seems that my reply should do three things. First, the reply should be empirically adequate, which will entail stating how it is possible to develop virtues in a manner that is psychologically possible for the ordinary agent. Second, the reply should be normatively adequate, which will entail that whatever virtues the reply states are psychologically possible for ordinary agents to develop are also recognizable as virtues. Third, the reply should make it possible to take the challenge of situationism seriously. In other words, regardless of what claims it makes of empirical and normative adequacy, if the reply makes such untenable claims which cannot be reconciled with the social psychological data on situational variables, it ought not to be accepted. Accordingly, it must be possible to accept such a reply without believing that the vast majority of agents are fully virtuous, that strategies which have repeatedly failed to help people become more virtuous in the past will work if they are tried again, and other such claims.

In light of the problems with the replies that I have considered thus far to situationism, it may seem that a virtue ethical theory such as the one I outlined in Chapter Two cannot meet these three conditions. In this section, however, I will argue that it can if such a reply states that virtues can be developed through a subset of ordinary habits. My account of habits is informed by a *dual processing* theory of cognition, which states that cognitive processes are of two types.<sup>220</sup> One type of cognitive processing is conscious, deliberative and inefficient, while the other is automatic, unconscious and efficient.

According to the dual processing theory of cognition, habits are automatic and cognitively efficient behaviors that are acquired through repetition of the same behavior.<sup>221</sup> Habits are automatic in the sense that they are responses to situational cues that do not require one to be consciously aware of the situational cue. They are cognitively efficient in the sense that they allow an agent to perform many of the same kinds of cognitive tasks that she could perform consciously and deliberately, but with far fewer mental resources. An example of both of these properties of habits can be found in the example of someone following their daily routine of driving to work. Through repeating the behavior of driving the same route to work several times a week, someone can catch themselves automatically driving to work even on an atypical day when they plan to go elsewhere. Their drive to work is cued by some situational feature such as getting into the car, and happens without their conscious awareness, since on an atypical day they might have a dentist's appointment, a doctor's appointment or some other destination they had planned to drive to instead of work. Finally, their drive

is cognitively efficient since the familiar pattern of following such directions as turning right on Elm and left on Main demand so few cognitive resources that they can allow the driver to devote attention to a conversation with a passenger or to a song on the radio.

Because this event of driving to work is cognitively efficient enough to free an agent to perform other mental tasks, it would be a mistake to think that while this event is happening, the agent is in a zombie-like daze and is mentally disengaged from any conscious activity. While the agent is driving to work, she can deliberate and focus her full attention and awareness on anything she chooses. It is simply that the process of driving to work itself is happening automatically and apart from her deliberation.

I claim that virtues just are automatic and cognitively efficient behaviors which are acquired through repetition of behavior. Just as repeatedly driving the same route each morning will eventually trigger an automatic behavior when certain situational cues are present, I claim that virtues can be developed in the same manner. If an agent wishes to develop the virtue of courage, for example, I submit that he can develop this habit by consciously deciding to do courageous acts when she is in a situation that presents her with reasons for acting courageously. If she repeatedly does this, I claim that she will eventually act courageously automatically whenever she is in the presence of the situational cue of having a reason for acting courageously.

I now argue that understanding virtues as ordinary habits allows the virtue ethicist to succeed where others have failed in providing a convincing reply to the moral

situationist. After providing this argument, I then argue that this account succeeds in meeting the three conditions of being both empirically and normatively adequate and taking situationism seriously enough.

As I stated in the introduction of this project, the subset of habits which I claim form the virtues are also character traits in the sense that they are the components of an individual character. All character traits are not necessarily habits, nor are all habits necessarily character traits. Some character traits could be global personality traits if globalism is true, but for the reasons provided in Chapter One of this project, I doubt that any are, as I doubt that there are any global personality traits. Many and perhaps even most habits are obviously not character traits. It is obvious that habits such as tooth brushing, gum chewing and fingernail biting have little to do with an agent's character. However, I claim that some character traits, namely those which form virtues such as compassion and honesty and vices such as cruelty and dishonesty are indeed habits.

Since habits such as gum chewing and tooth brushing concern a narrow range of behaviors, it may seem that my claim about some habits being identical to some character traits is a claim that bears a striking similarity to Doris' claim that the components of individual character are fine grained local traits. Our claims are similar, but there are two important differences. First, I claim that these traits are habits rather than simply local traits because I claim that they can be developed in the same way that ordinary habits are developed, namely through repetition of the same behavior. Second,

Doris' local traits are simply too fine grained to be identical to Aristotelian virtues, which determine behavior in a wide range of situations. While I grant that all habits by definition, concern a narrow range of behaviors, I argue that this should not preclude them from being considered character traits and therefore virtues and vices.

#### **Section 4.2.2 Virtues as Ordinary Habits**

In light of the data from the situationist studies which I reconstructed in Chapter One, it seems clear that while situational variables do not always operate in the same manner, it is at least clear that they operate on a preconscious and automatic level. Sometimes people are conscious of the presence of these situational variables but are not conscious of their influence their judgments. For example, while Latane and Darley found that while experimental subjects were much less likely to treat a situation as an emergency if a confederate bystander acted calmly and passively, the passive subjects in these studies "always" insisted that the behavior of the confederate had no influence on their own behavior.<sup>222</sup> At other times, however, it seems that people are not even conscious of the presence of the situational variable. In a study by Bargh, Chen and Burrows which supports this finding, 41 non-African American undergraduates found that although those who were subliminally exposed to a picture of a young African American male face behaved more aggressively than those who were subliminally exposed to a picture of a young Caucasian male face, only two of the 41 subjects reported noticing a picture of a face at all. Moreover, even these two subjects could not correctly identify the race of the person in the picture.<sup>223</sup>



Although these situational variables operate on a preconscious level, this need not entail that agents cannot combat at least some situational stimuli by becoming consciously aware of their potential influences on one's behavior. At least one study has found that when experimental subjects are aware of the way in which certain types of situational stimuli can influence their behavior, they can both prepare for and resist such stimuli.<sup>224</sup> There are two problems with such a strategy, however. First, it can do nothing to help an agent combat the influence of subliminal situational stimuli, since these stimuli occur without the agent's awareness at all. For this reason, if this strategy is promising at all, it is only promising as a strategy for combating those situational stimuli of which one is aware but which one does not ordinarily take to influence one's behavior. Second, it is not even clear that this strategy is even so promising as a way of combating these situational stimuli. Situational stimuli are so pervasive, being consciously prepared for the way in which all of them may influence one's behavior at all times is likely to severely tax one's limited cognitive resources.<sup>225</sup>

Since situational pressures seem to influence moral judgment at a preconscious and automatic level, I propose that the best way to combat these pressures is also at the preconscious and automatic level. This would happen by the very same process through which ordinary habits are formed. Just as one can develop automatic and cognitively efficient habits such as driving the same route to work each day by consciously repeating the same pattern of behavior, I suggest that the same can be done with virtuous behaviors. By repeatedly practicing particular virtuous behaviors whenever they judge that a particularly virtuous behavior is called for, I claim that agents can

develop automatic and cognitively efficient habits that will combat the influence of situational stimuli even when they are not aware of the presence of these stimuli.

It may be noted that some of the claims I am making in this chapter about habits will bear some resemblance to the claims of others such as P. Railton who argue that the best way to combat situational influences is through the development of habits.<sup>226</sup> But while I agree with Railton, I also make the further claim that virtues just are a subset of habits. Moreover, I am referring to such habits as “ordinary” not because everything which is commonly referred to as a habit will necessarily bear much resemblance to a virtue. As Railton and J. Annas have both pointed out, “mindless” behaviors such as the habit of “unconsciously winding and rewinding a strand of hair around a finger” when one is nervous has little to do with virtues such as justice, generosity, or courage.<sup>227</sup> Neither does the habit of “biting [one’s] nails.”<sup>228</sup> But the fact that some habits are mindless dispositions does not preclude the possibility that one could develop intelligent habits of responding to reasons for being just, generous and courageous in the same ordinary way that one might develop the habit of daily exercise or driving a certain route to work each morning.

The sub-set of habits which make up the virtues are distinct from “mindless” habits for three reasons. First, as I argued in Chapter Two, even though virtues are non-rational, they are still cognitive. Aristotle claims that virtues include the exercise of non-rational *phantasia* or appearance-reception which is a form of cognition of which even non-rational animals are capable. Perhaps every habit, including habits such as nail-

biting is intelligent in at least this minimal way, and it would be a mistake to label any habit as being completely “mindless”. But it is worth noting that those habits which are intelligent in this minimal way include the virtues regardless of what might be the case with the entire set of habits.

Second, habits such as biting one’s nails are often “counterintentional” habits, or habits which an agent develops despite the fact that she regrets having them.<sup>229</sup> But it would be odd for anyone to claim that a particular disposition was morally excellent or responsive to moral reasons if someone who had such a disposition could regret having it. Someone who had a habit of acting compassionately by helping elderly people cross the street but who wished that she would push them into traffic instead could not have the virtue of compassion. As I stated in Chapter Two, for Aristotle, virtues must involve *prohaeresis* or commitment, which entails that they must be deliberately developed. Thus, while I therefore agree that some habits are mindless behaviors, I claim that habits which are mindless are limited to counter-intentional habits, and that a necessary condition for a character trait being a virtue is that the agent who has such a trait must value having it.

The third reason habits seem to have little in common with virtues is because, as I argued in Chapter Two, in order to be strictly virtuous one must be practically wise. This does not entail, however, that practical wisdom itself is a component of the moral virtues. In Chapter Two, I argued that for Aristotle the moral virtues can function apart from the exercise of practical wisdom such as when a virtuous person must act

immediately without time for deliberation. An agent can deliberate while acting out of a virtue, just as one can deliberate while acting out of any habit. But since for Aristotle it clearly seems possible to act immediately and without deliberation out of virtue, it seems to me that virtues are habits which operate on the preconscious, automatic and cognitively efficient level. Thus, although for Aristotle in a person who is strictly virtuous, moral virtue and practical wisdom will be co-instantiated, if moral virtue can function apart from practical wisdom it would seem that the moral virtues are logically distinct from practical wisdom.<sup>230</sup> It should be clear from Chapter Two that this thesis about virtue functioning independently from practical wisdom is a controversial one among Aristotle commentators, but it should be equally clear that without this thesis, virtues cannot be ordinary habits.

Now that I have provided a brief sketch of my account of virtues as ordinary habits, I will turn to the task of completing my account by stating how it meets the three conditions of being both empirically and normatively adequate and allowing me to take situationism seriously enough. I will consider each of these conditions in turn.

### **Section 4.2.3 Empirical Adequacy**

In order to establish the empirical adequacy of my account of virtues as ordinary habits, it may seem that one should first cite a sufficient number of empirical studies which would confirm the existence of habits, and then proceed to cite a sufficient number of empirical studies which would confirm that at least some of those habits are virtues. But whether or not habits can be virtues is not an empirical question but a

philosophical question, since virtues have a normative component. I will therefore proceed to establish the empirical adequacy of my thesis by arguing for the empirical evidence for their existence, and then turn to the philosophical issue of whether habits can be virtues by considering their normative adequacy.

My account of habits is empirically adequate simply because there are no shortage of studies which suggest that certain behaviors are automatic, cognitively efficient and predictable through frequent repetition. We have already seen that Latané and Darley (1970) and Bargh, Chen and Burrows (1996) clearly support the existence of automatic cognitive processes. In addition to these two studies, the existence of cognitively efficient processes have been supported by studies which have found that conscious decisions consume so many cognitive resources that it is simply unreasonable to believe that most of an average person's daily decisions take place through anything other than automatic and efficient mental processes.<sup>231</sup> Finally, studies which suggest that behaviors can become predictable through repetition include several studies on snacking routines, all of which confirmed that a subject's past snacking behavior would be a better predictor of her future snacking behavior than her set of preferences, attitudes and intentions.<sup>232</sup> In addition to these studies, C. Armitage conducted a longitudinal study on the habit of daily exercise in which it was found that continuing a certain behavior for at least five week period makes it safe to predict that the behavior will persist for at least twelve weeks, if not much longer.<sup>233</sup>

It may seem unnecessary to cite empirical studies on the existence of ordinary habits, since the proposition that people have habits seems to be established by

common sense. The findings of social psychology have shown us, however, that not everything which seems to be established on the basis of common sense is necessarily true. Common sense may tell us, for example, that most people's moral judgment will not be affected by subtle situational pressures like weather, ambient sounds, ambient odors, and so forth. However, this is a matter in which the empirical data from social psychology tells us that common sense is simply wrong. Since common sense is not to be trusted when it comes to subtle situational pressures, it would seem to follow that we should perhaps be careful in trusting common sense when it comes to the development of habits as well. Therefore, even though it may seem that no one can seriously doubt that certain behaviors are automatic, cognitively efficient and become predictable through repetition, it is helpful to know that in this case, at least, what common sense tells us is also confirmed by empirical research.

In addition to this empirical evidence supporting the existence of ordinary habits, empirical research also supports both my claim that habits can become stronger with repetition and my claim that the influence of strong habits can be resisted by forming new habits. The results of one experiment on learning showed that when experimental subjects were asked to recall words on a list after short intervals of time, they remembered they tended to recall the most recent words, but when they were asked to recall the words on a list after a longer interval of time, they recalled the first words on the list.<sup>234</sup> The data from an experiment on rats also had similar results. In this experiment, rats were exposed to a tone and a subsequent electric shock until they exhibited behavior indicating that they came to expect the shock after the tone. Once

the rats exhibited this behavior, a pattern of events was started in which the tone was followed by the presentation of food. After one day of the rats not hearing tones, when the tone was once again introduced, the rats exhibited behavior consistent with expecting food. After twenty- eight days of not hearing tones, however, the rats once again exhibited shock anticipatory behavior.<sup>235</sup>

What some researchers have concluded from these experiments is that in all cognitive learning, which includes the learning of habits, whatever is first learned can be replaced by something which is recently learned, but the more time passes after something is recently learned, the more likely a learning subject is to forget what is recently learned and remember what was first learned.<sup>236</sup> When it comes to habitual learning, what this research suggests is that the influence of old habits of behavior can be resisted through new habits which become stronger through constant repetition. If the new habits are allowed to weaken over time without repetition, however, old habits will re-emerge.

#### **Section 4.2.4 Normative Adequacy**

In Section 4.1, I considered the various reasons why CAPS traits, local virtues and aggregated traits all fail to be the kind of character traits which could be identified as virtues in a normatively adequate theory. In light of the problems with these other traits, it seems likely that my claim that a certain sub-set of habits should be identified as virtues will be met with a healthy degree of skepticism. For this reason, I will now address certain objections about the normative adequacy of a virtue theory built around

such habits. These objections concern the potential for habits to be temporally stable, trans-situationally consistent and responsive to moral reasons.

### *Temporal Stability*

Since in addition to claiming that they are automatic and cognitively efficient, I am claiming that habits are predictable for anyone who is in the presence of a situational cue, temporal stability is built into my definition of habits. Moreover, I do not think that such a definition revises the common sense definition of habits. Anyone who claims that  $p$  is a habit and yet denies that  $p$  is a temporally stable behavior would seem not to know what a habit is. However, we may wonder if temporal stability is an important property for habits to have in order for them to be virtues. As we saw in section 4.1, Mark Alfano argues that even though factitious virtues may lack temporal stability, if agents can do no better than to develop factitious virtues we need not worry that they can only develop character traits which lack the property of temporal stability. If agents can do no better than to develop factitious virtues this is certainly true, but I will now argue that if someone can either develop a character traits that is temporally stable or one which is not, with all else being equal, she should develop the temporally stable trait. In order to see this, however, it is necessary to consider the reasons why temporal stability is morally important.

In Section 4.1, I considered the merits of Alfano's argument that if virtues lack the property of trans-situational consistency, then it will be difficult to try and enumerate the number of virtues an agent has. Such virtues would be local traits like "generosity



toward one's mother" and according to this argument, if Joe is generous toward both his mother and his father, it would be unclear whether Joe has one, two, or even three virtues. Joe could have the single virtue of "generosity-toward-one's-parents", he could have the virtues of "generosity-toward-one's-mother" and "generosity-toward-one's-father", or he could have all three. Ironically though, Alfano seems not to anticipate that the same problem can arise for character traits which lack the property of temporal stability.

To see how this problem arises for character traits which are trans-situationally consistent but not temporally stable, let us imagine the following scenario. Suppose that instead of only being generous toward his parents, Joe is generous toward everyone, but only at  $t_1$  and  $t_2$ . If Joe's generosity need not be temporally stable in order to be a virtue, then we will need to know how many temporal generosity Joe has. Either Joe has the single virtue of *generosity at  $t_1$  and  $t_2$* , Joe has the two separate virtues of *generosity at  $t_1$*  and *generosity at  $t_2$* , or Joe has all three virtues.

So far, I have been arguing that an account of trans-situational but temporally unstable traits will need to specify how many traits an agent like Joe has. But it may be objected that this complaint about such an account is irrelevant to what I said my argument was going to be, which is that agents have a reason to develop temporally stable traits if they can just as easily develop a trait without this property. According to this objection, if Joe has no reason to prefer developing a temporally stable and trans-situationally consistent virtue of generosity to a virtue of generosity which is merely

trans-situationally consistent, then it shouldn't matter to him how many different traits of generosity he has. Being able to state precisely how many traits Joe has ought to matter to moral philosophers who are in the business of constructing moral theories, but it shouldn't matter to him.

The problem with this objection, however, is that it *should* matter to Joe just how many virtues he has if he has no reason to prefer temporally stable virtues to virtues which lack this property. If it does not matter whether Joe's temporally unstable virtue of generosity is really two, three or ten different virtues of generosity, then this can only be because Joe's reasons for being generous are not bound by temporal limitations. If Joe's generosity which stretches across time is responsive to his reasons for being generous, then it might be silly for Joe to worry about just how many different generosities he has. But if we are to suppose that Joe will have reasons for being generous in generosity-relevant situations at  $t_1$  but not  $t_2$ , or  $t_1$  and  $t_2$  but not  $t_3$ , then it should matter to him whether he has those traits and only those traits which will allow him to act generously at the appropriate times. However, I doubt that anyone would argue that one's reasons for having any virtue have such temporal boundaries. If Joe has a reason for being generous in one situation but not in another situation and the situations are identical except for the fact that the first situation is at  $t_1$  and the second is at  $t_2$ , then his reasons for being generous are bizarre ones, as his reasons for acting out of any virtue would be in such circumstances. In light of these considerations, I think that given the choice between developing temporally unstable and temporally stable

virtues with all else being equal, agents should choose to develop temporally stable virtues.

### *Responsiveness to Moral Reasons*

While one may be willing to grant that ordinary habits are temporally stable, it may seem odd to claim that habits can be responsive to moral reasons, since actions done from a habit are automatic and preconscious, and such responsiveness may seem to be involuntary.

For Aristotle, however, habitual actions are clearly voluntary since any action in which the moving principle is the agent himself is a voluntary action, even if the action is done on the spur of the moment. Aristotle even allows that animals can perform voluntary actions.<sup>237</sup> There are only two kinds of actions which are not voluntary for Aristotle.<sup>238</sup> The first is those which are done under constraint; <sup>239</sup> the second are those performed by reason of ignorance.<sup>240</sup> Aristotle even allows that some ignorant actions can be voluntary; whether they are or not depends upon the type of ignorance involved. The distinction which makes a difference for him depends on whether they are performed in ignorance or by reason of ignorance. Actions which are performed in a state of drunkenness or a rage are performed in ignorance and are therefore voluntary.<sup>241</sup>

It may seem that by including a sub-set of actions which are done on the spur of the moment, and which animals as well as drunken humans can perform under the heading of voluntary actions, Aristotle is including too many actions under this heading. Thus,

contra Aristotle, it may seem that voluntary actions should be more narrowly defined as those actions which involve conscious choice and deliberation and which cannot therefore be the part of an automatic and preconscious process.

It can be granted that ordinary habits will not be responsive to reasons if being responsive to reasons requires habits to be voluntary in this sense. I have already stated that habits are not voluntary in this sense since they can govern an agent's behavior in spite of her intentions and desires not to behave that way. Therefore those who believe that whatever is rational must be voluntary in this sense would exclude at least some habits from rational evaluation. But even if the class of voluntary actions were restricted to actions that were deliberately and consciously chosen, such a restriction would not preclude the sub-set of habits which form the set of virtues from being voluntary. I stated in Chapter Two that the habits which form the virtues are the product of deliberate choices, although they allow agents to act immediately and automatically once they are formed.

In addition to the possibility of this sub-set of habits being voluntary and thus responsive to reasons, it might even be argued that there are occasions in which an agent will act rationally only if she acts immediately and automatically. For example, one who jumps into a shallow pool to save a drowning infant only after deliberating about what to do does not seem to be nearly as responsive to her moral reasons for being compassionate as one who jumps in immediately and out of a habitual reflex-like response. Certainly there are times in which responding to moral reasons would seem

to require careful deliberation rather than reflexive action. A general who makes a hasty decision about whether or not to send troops to the slaughter may seem shallow for failing to give due time to considering such morally serious matters. But for at least a sub-set of our moral reasons, it seems that being responsive to those reasons is not only compatible with acting immediately and automatically, it even *requires* acting immediately and automatically.

### *Trans-Situational Consistency*

Let us now turn to a potential problem for the trans-situational consistency of habits. In order to introduce this problem, we will first need to consider why I claim that habits can be trans-situationally consistent. I will begin with these claims and then turn to the potential problem.

In Section 4.1, I argued that the situationist studies give us no reason to conclude that character traits cannot be trans-situationally consistent. What the data from these studies gives us a reason to assume, rather, is that trans-situationally consistent character traits are often so weakly instantiated that they fail to determine an agent's behavior in certain strong situations. In this section, I have further argued that the kinds of pressures which were observed to affect behavior in the situationist studies affect agents on the automatic and preconscious level rather than the conscious and deliberative level. What follows from these two claims is that in strong situations, an agent will be exposed to certain cues that trigger an automatic, habitual response which will determine an agent's behavior instead of the agent's character trait. If an agent's

character trait is sufficiently strong, then the agent will be able to resist the situational pressure. What usually happens in the situations of social psychological experiments, however, is that the situational pressures agents are exposed to are much stronger than whatever character trait the agent has such as compassion.

If character traits are themselves simply habits which are triggered whenever an agent is in the presence of the situational cue of a particular kind of moral reason, then I think we can hope that through repeated practice, virtuous habitual responses can become strong enough to determine an agent's behavior even when an agent who has a virtue is in a particularly strong situation. Such strong habits would be trans-situationally consistent since they would determine an agent's behavior in both strong and weak situations. To see how this would happen, let us suppose that  $\phi$  is the situational cue of having a moral reason for  $\psi$ -ing, and  $\pi$  is one of the kinds of situational cues which social psychologists have observed to determine behavior in accordance with moral failure such as hurriedness, bad weather, and loud noises. Let us further suppose that a given agent is practicing  $\psi$ -ing often enough to develop the habit of  $\psi$ -ing automatically whenever she is in a situation with  $\phi$ . According to my argument, even if an agent has a habit of acting viciously when she is in the presence of  $\pi$ , if she will  $\psi$  often enough in the presence of  $\phi$ , then her habit of  $\psi$ -ing can become sufficiently strong to make her  $\psi$  even when she is in the presence of both  $\phi$  and  $\pi$ .

It seems that common sense reflection on typical habits shows that while habits may always be fine grained and local in the sense that they are responsive to particular

cues, these cues can trigger habitual responses in a wide variety of situations. One can see this by reflecting on an agent who has a strong habit of exercising every morning. The situational cue of hearing her alarm go off triggers her to start exercising by putting on a jogging suit and going outside to (say) run a few miles. Her habit of exercising is responsive to a particular cue, but she can respond to this cue in a variety of types of situations. She might exercise on cold mornings, rainy mornings, warm and sunny mornings, or even mornings when she is on vacation thousands of miles from home. If her habit of exercising is weak, the situational cue of the alarm going off might compete with other habits, such as her habit of sleeping late on cold mornings, or the habit of relaxing on vacation. But what would make her habit fine-grained and local in such a case is just the fact that her habit of exercising is not as strong as her competing habits. If her habit is especially strong, it will only be fine-grained and local in the sense that it is responsive to a particular situational cue.

Developing habits which are resistant to situational pressures are one way in which a virtuous person can respond to the trans-situational demands of particular virtues, but such habits are not sufficient for responding to such demands. Even if habits are resistant to situational pressures, this does not entail that a possessor of such habits will know how to act virtuously across a wide range of situations. In Chapter Two, I defined practical reasoning as means-end reasoning. It should be clear that anyone with the moral virtues which I have defined as habits will also need to have such means-end reasoning in order to respond to the demands of a particular virtue across a wide range of situations. She will need to know, for example, that while telling a painful truth in one

situation may be the best way to be compassionate in one situation, it may be cruel in another situation.

While I have allowed that having practical wisdom is essential for being virtuous in the strict sense, I think that practical wisdom is of little relevance when it comes to the situationist critique of virtue ethics. In Chapter One, I stated that according to Doris and Harman, the problem that experimental social psychology raises for virtue ethics is not that its experimental data shows that too many people are simply morally imperfect, but that too many people fail in the requirements of minimal decency. I think another way of putting Doris and Harman's point is that this data does not simply show that too many people fail to have the moral expertise of an experienced *phronimos*. Rather, they failed to do what should have been obviously right to even a novice at moral thinking in far too many experimental situations. It should have been obvious to the participants in Milgram's Obedience Experiment that applying apparently dangerous electric shocks to an experimental confederate was cruel. It should also have been obvious to those who took the role of prison guards in the Stanford Prison Experiment that forcing guards to clean out toilets with their bare hands was sadistic behavior. Finally, it should have been obvious to the students at Princeton Seminary that helping the distressed stranger in the doorway was more important morally than being on time to class. The problem that social psychology raises for virtue ethics is not simply that it problematizes the intelligent virtues of the moral experts. Rather it even problematizes the ordinary virtues of the moral beginners.



I think that what the lesson of social psychology has for virtue ethics is that too few people have developed the ordinary habits of acting virtuously through repeated virtuous actions that are necessary even for the moral beginner. This claim about ordinary habits, however, is not meant to deny the obvious fact that situational pressures seem to affect one's moral judgment or one's process of deliberation. It seems to be the case that many of the subjects of Milgram's Obedience Experiment deliberated before administering some of their apparent shocks to their experimental confederates. Some of Milgram's subjects exhibited signs of intense stress in behaviors such as sweating, trembling and stuttering.<sup>242</sup> Admittedly, this behavior is consistent with deliberating about whether they should obey or disobey the commands of the experimenter rather than obeying in a manner which can be described as "automatic". Furthermore, one experiment also found that subjects who were asked to make moral judgments about the moral status of different behaviors issued harsher condemnations of certain acts when they were exposed to disgusting conditions such as foul odors and dirty desks than those who were not exposed to such conditions. (Schnall, et al. (2008)) What is important for our present purposes, however, is that just as I have argued that situational pressures do not enter the conscious awareness of a subject whose outward behavior is affected by such pressures, the same seems to be true about deliberating subjects. In Schnall et al. for example, only one or two of the forty subjects in both the disgusting and non-disgusting conditions claimed that the presence or absence of disgusting odors had any effect on their moral judgments.<sup>243</sup>

Given this lack of awareness, while I do not deny that situational factors can affect the judgment and deliberation of moral agents, I also make the following claim. While situational pressures clearly affect cognitive processes, the cognitive processes they affect are preconscious processes which influence conscious ones. I have argued that the reason these preconscious pressures are so influential on moral behavior is because the subjects who prove vulnerable to these pressures have not developed strong enough preconscious habits which can act to resist these pressures. In my judgment, therefore, what the situationist studies show is not that agents with virtues lack the practical wisdom which would allow them to make good moral judgments amid situational pressures, it is that agents cannot make good moral judgments amid situational pressures because they lack moral virtues.

#### **Section 4.2.5 Taking Situationism Seriously Enough**

There are two reasons why my claims in this chapter about developing virtues may seem not to take situationism with sufficient seriousness. The first reason has to do with situational effects on moral judgments and the second has to do with what my theory prescribes. I will consider these in turn.

##### *Moral Judgments*

I have claimed that one can develop virtues as one develops ordinary habits through the repetition of virtuous behaviors. Given studies such as Schnall et al which suggest that situational stimuli can impair one's moral judgments, however, it might be thought that my claim does not take situationism with sufficient seriousness for the

following reason.<sup>244</sup> Supposing that generosity is both a virtue and a habit, it is obvious that one cannot develop the virtue of generosity by performing just any act. Performing ungenerous acts will clearly not make one more generous and may even make one less generous, and performing honest acts will neither make one more nor less generous. Thus, in order to perform generous acts with sufficient frequency to develop the habit of generosity, it seems that one must have the ability to judge which acts are generous and which ones are not or else simply be lucky enough to consistently perform generous acts in spite of lacking good judgment. But apart from being so lucky, it seems one must have an ability for which the situationist studies suggest that there is no empirical evidence.

I do not dispute the findings of these studies, but my proposal does not entail any commitment to the ambitious view that an agent's capacity for moral judgment must allow her to discern what she has an *all things considered reason* for doing. My proposal only entails a commitment to the much more modest thesis that an agent must only be able to discern what she has any moral reason for doing, even if it is not an *all things considered reason*.

My proposal that in order to develop a particular virtue  $\phi$  that an agent should practice  $\phi$ -ing when she judges that she has a moral reason to  $\phi$  should not be confused with the claim that an agent should  $\phi$  when she judges that she has an *all things considered reason* not to  $\phi$ . In fact, anyone who could be persuaded that they ought to  $\phi$  even when they are convinced that they have an *all things considered reason*

not to  $\phi$  would seem not to know what an *all things considered* reason is. But my claim that an agent will develop the virtue  $\phi$  after repeatedly  $\phi$ -ing whenever she judges that she has a reason to  $\phi$  can allow for the possibility that an agent's moral judgment might be flawed in two important ways. First, it allows for the possibility that she could believe that she has an *all things considered* reason to  $\phi$  when she only has some reason to  $\phi$ . Second, it allows for the possibility that when she has an all things considered reason either to  $\phi$  or not to  $\phi$  she might not be sure of what she has an *all things considered* reason to do.

This modest proposal, however, will likely raise the following objection. According to this objection, I have no reason to assume that even the capacity for discerning when one has any moral reason for acting out of a certain virtue is immune to situational influences, since it is possible for someone to act courageously, compassionately, or virtuously in some other way even when she has no reason to do so, and even a reason *not* to do so.

I find this objection to be unconvincing. It might be thought that someone could act courageously, compassionately, justly, or in some other virtuous way without any moral reason for doing so until one remembers that to describe someone's action with these adverbs is not to describe it in a value-neutral way. As I stated in the introduction to this project, character terms are thick terms, and therefore to claim that someone acted courageously, justly, and so forth is not only to describe their action but to call it morally praiseworthy in some way. Thus, to say that someone acted courageously but

had no moral reason for doing so would be tantamount to saying that he acted in a morally praiseworthy way, but had no moral reason for doing so.

It might seem false that one acts for some moral reason whenever one acts out of some moral virtue, since this proposition will have some rather counterintuitive implications. It will entail, for example, that the person who is honest in a thoughtless way ('That dress is ugly') has a reason to be honest, the courageous terrorist has a reason to be courageous and so does anyone who acts in a putatively virtuous way, but who ultimately acts viciously. But there are two things to say about this worry. First, one's having some reason to act out of a virtue need not entail that one has an *all things considered* reason for acting out of that virtue. Second, I don't think we should deny that acting honestly in the former case or acting courageously in the latter case are virtuous ways of acting simply because these actions promote bad states of affairs. The world might be a better place if thoughtless people were dishonest and terrorists were cowardly, but this does not make dishonesty and cowardice virtues rather than vices. Just as the mere fact that cowardice and dishonesty lead to good states of affairs in such cases seems an insufficient reason to claim that they are virtues, the mere fact that courage and honesty sometimes lead to bad states of affairs seems an insufficient reason to deny that they are virtues.<sup>245</sup>

### *Moral Prescriptions*

The second reason why it might be thought that my account does not take situationism seriously enough can be put in the form of a dilemma for me. In order to

develop the kind of virtue-habits that I am prescribing, either agents will have to practice these habits even when doing so means acting against their moral judgments, or only when they are acting according to their moral judgments. However, there are serious problems with either prescription. If I am prescribing that agents take the former option and practice virtue-habits even when doing so means acting against their moral judgments then this would mean engaging in the following type of action. It would mean that for the sake of developing the virtue-habit of honesty, an agent should tell the truth so often that one should even act against one's judgment that one should not tell Kant's famous murderer at the door where one is hiding his intended victim. But if I am prescribing that agents act against their judgments in such way, then surely my account would alienate agents from their commitments if any account would. On the other hand, if I am prescribing that agents practice developing their virtue-habits only when their moral judgments tell them to, then I am prescribing something that people who would be interested in developing such virtue-habits do already. However, if there is any empirical evidence that such a course of action allows such agents to resist situational pressures, then the burden of proof is on me to provide it.

The problem with this putative dilemma is that it is, in fact, a false dilemma. First, as I stated in Chapter One, not every virtue is a high-fidelity virtue such as the virtue of honesty. Honesty seems to demand that the honest agent never cheat on his spouse, never tell a lie, never steal and so forth. Other virtues, however, seem to be low-fidelity virtues. Low-fidelity virtues such as the virtue of generosity do not seem to require an agent to act generously whenever she has an opportunity for acting generously. If it is

not convenient to act generously at a particular moment, she can decide to wait and act generously at a more convenient moment. With low-fidelity virtues such as generosity, therefore, it is not always the case that when an agent finds herself in a situation in which she could act generously she must act generously or else she is acting wrongly, even though an agent who rarely or never acts generously will not be generous.

Given this distinction between high-fidelity and low-fidelity virtues, I do not think it is the case that moral agents act for the sake of low-fidelity virtues whenever they have the opportunity to do so. What the situationist studies suggest, however, is that failing to practice a low-fidelity could lead to a failure to develop that low-fidelity virtue at all. Thus, if an agent fails to act generously at a set of situations  $s_1$  and  $s_2$  because she is waiting to act generously at  $s_3$  and  $s_4$ , she may find that she has the following problem at  $s_3$  and  $s_4$ . Because her habit of generosity is insufficiently developed through insufficient practice, in these later situations her moral judgment will be influenced by situational pressures that an automatic habit of generosity could have resisted. Thus, I do not think that believe that practicing low-fidelity virtues at every available is what agents do already and the situationist studies suggest that practicing them at every available opportunity or at least at many more available opportunities is more urgent.

High-fidelity virtues may seem to present a greater challenge to my thesis. Since high-fidelity virtues seem to demand that one act in accordance with such virtues at every opportunity one has to do so, they present me with the following problem. I don't think I can convincingly argue that moral agents who are interested in being virtuous

aren't already trying to follow the strict demands of high-fidelity virtues. Nonetheless, even with high-fidelity virtues my account does not face the aforementioned dilemma. It is not the case that in order to prescribe a way of behaving that is not what those interested in developing virtues are already doing, I must prescribe that agents act against their moral judgments. The reason for this is because it is often the case that a moral agent must suspend their judgment since they are caught between the demands of two high-fidelity virtues and though they judge they have a reason for acting according to both, they aren't sure what they have an all-things-considered reason for doing. For example, honesty and compassion both seem to be high-fidelity virtues, but one could be torn between telling a compassionate lie or a hurtful truth. In such a case, I would prescribe that an agent tell the compassionate lie if she is seeking to develop the virtue of compassion, or the hurtful truth if she is seeking to develop the virtue of honesty. While it may clearly be the case that both virtues are equally important, one who tries to develop too many habits at the same time will likely develop none since they will practice them all too infrequently.

In addition to providing this prescription, I will grant that perhaps some human agents already are trying to develop virtues as I have described them, and there is no reason to doubt that their efforts have not met with success. I have already stated that I agree with those who employ the rarity argument that the data which supports situationism is consistent with the thesis that some people are virtuous. However, the fact that most people do not instantiate the virtues is no objection to my prescription, since it seems unlikely that most people see the need to develop preconscious,



automatic and cognitively efficient habits which will resist subtle situational pressures. What seems far more likely is that most people trust that their conscious and deliberative processes are capable of allowing them to make competent moral judgments in most any situation, unless they encounter a situation which requires the moral expertise of a practically wise person.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have argued that all of the replies to moral situationism so far have failed to demonstrate that a theory of virtues can be both normatively and empirically adequate. On one hand, those who show how a theory of virtues can be empirically adequate, such as those who employ the CAPS reply, the aggregation reply and the factitious virtue reply usually fail to show how such a theory can be normatively adequate. On the other hand, those who show how a theory of virtues can be normatively adequate, such as those who employ the avoidance strategy, generally fail to show how such a theory can be empirically adequate.

I have argued that the demand to have a theory of virtues that is both normatively and empirically adequate can be satisfied by a theory which identifies virtues as a subset of ordinary habits. I have argued that such a theory is empirically adequate since the existence of habits which are automatic and cognitively efficient behaviors which are learned through repetition is supported by empirical data. I have further argued that such a theory is also normatively adequate since habits can be trans-situationally

consistent and temporally stable patterns of behavior which are responsive to moral reasons.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> As Anscombe claims in “Modern Moral Philosophy” (31), “it is as if the notion ‘criminal’ were to remain when criminal law and criminal courts had been abolished and forgotten. A Hume discovering this situation might conclude that there was a special sentiment, expressed by ‘criminal’ which alone gave the word its sense.”

<sup>2</sup> Social psychology is a sub-discipline within the broader discipline of psychology which attempts to know “how the thought, feeling and behavior of individuals” is affected “by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others” Allport, *Personality*, 3. Thus, social psychologists will study the social determinants of such phenomena as how an individual forms political opinions, how she comes to accept certain gender roles, and how she comes to learn a language. Such phenomena are also studied by other social sciences such as political science and sociology, but while the former primarily study phenomena as gender roles and political opinions on a social level, social psychologists study such phenomena on an individual level.

<sup>3</sup> Compare Hurka *Virtue, Vice and Value* and Watson “The Primacy of Character,” 56-81 with McAleer “Aristotelian Account,” 208-225 and Slote *From Morality to Virtue*, 89. The “controversy” over how to define virtue ethics finds Thomas Hurka and Gary Watson on one side of this debate and Sean McAleer and Michael Slote on the other side of the debate. Hurka and Watson both argue that only those normative ethical theories which make virtue the most basic explanatory concept deserve to be called forms of virtue ethics. McAleer and Slote, however, define virtue ethics more broadly. It should be obvious that I do not accept Hurka and Watson’s more narrow definition of virtue ethics since their definition would exclude my account (forthcoming in Chapter Two) from the class of virtue ethical theories. I accept Slote’s definition of virtue ethics as any normative ethical theory which (1) treats “aretaic notions (like ‘good’ or ‘excellent’) rather than deontic notions (like ‘morally wrong’ ‘ought’ ‘right’ and ‘obligation’) as primary” and (2) puts “a greater emphasis on the ethical assessment of agents and their inner motives and character traits than it puts on the evaluation of acts and choices.”

<sup>4</sup> In *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues* (ix), Daniel Russell defines the distinction between virtue theory and virtue ethics in the same way.

<sup>5</sup> In *Character and Moral Psychology*, (9) Miller notes that Kenneth Bowers seems to be one among many psychologists who hold this identity view. I think Miller is right about this, although Bowers does not explicitly claim to subscribe to this view. See Bowers, "Situationism in Psychology," 332.

<sup>6</sup> Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*, 244.

<sup>7</sup> Allport, *Personality*, 48.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 295.

<sup>9</sup> In "Dispositions," Choi and Fara call this definition the "Simple Conditional Analysis".

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Choi, "Dispositional Properties and Counterfactual Conditionals," 795-841.

<sup>11</sup> Blackburn, "Morality and Thick Concepts," 296.

<sup>12</sup> Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*, 245.

<sup>13</sup> Doris, *Lack of Character*, 22.

<sup>14</sup> Since I am defining situationism as skepticism about the conjunction of (1)-(3), my definition allows for the possibility that different situationists may be skeptical of different propositions within this conjunction. Doris, for example, is willing to accept (2), while in "Moral Psychology" (326), Harman seems to express skepticism of even this thesis. I read Doris to allow for (2) because he is convinced by studies such as Hartshorne and May which report high correlations between behaviors in different trials of the same situation. Harman, on the other hand, seems to think that these high correlations are best explained without the use of temporally stable traits.

<sup>15</sup> In *Lack of Character* (19) Doris thus claims "not every consistent behavior pattern is telling evidence for trait attribution. If someone consistently behaves gregariously across a run of situations where most everyone would, their behavior is not decisive evidence for extraversion."

<sup>16</sup> For a description of the distinction between powerful and weak situations see Mischel "Interaction," 346.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>18</sup> For example, see Harman, "Moral Psychology," 322.

<sup>19</sup> For more on the distinction between L-data, Q-data and T-data, see Catell, *The Scientific Analysis of Personality*, 61.

<sup>20</sup> Mischel, *Personality and Assessment*, 69.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>23</sup> Miller, "The Magic Number Seven," 81-97.

<sup>24</sup> Mandler, "Organization and Memory," 328-372.

<sup>25</sup> Mischel, *Personality and Assessment*, 54.

<sup>26</sup> See Doris, *Lack of Character*, 67.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>28</sup> Rosenthal and Jacobsen, *Pygmalion in the Classroom*.

<sup>29</sup> Ross and Nisbett, *The Person and The Situation*, 12.

<sup>30</sup> Nisbett and Ross, *Human Inference*.

<sup>31</sup> See Markus and Zajonc, "The Cognitive Perspective," 179.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 181.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 122-123.

<sup>35</sup> Jones and Harris, "The Attribution of Attitudes," 1-24.

<sup>36</sup> Ross, Amabile and Steinmetz, "Social Roles," 485-494.

<sup>37</sup> Wyatt and Campbell, "Liability," 496-500.

<sup>38</sup> Hartshorne and May, *Nature of Character*.

<sup>39</sup> Mischel and Peake, "Cross-Situational Consistency," 730-755.

<sup>40</sup> Isen and Levin, "Effects of Feeling Good," 384-388.

<sup>41</sup> Baron "Sweet Smell," 498-503.

<sup>42</sup> Latané and Rodin "A Lady in Distress," 189-202; and Latané and Darley, *The Unresponsive Bystander*.

<sup>43</sup> Darley and Batson, "From Jerusalem to Jericho," 100-108.

<sup>44</sup> Milgram, "Behavioral Study of Obedience," 371-378.

<sup>45</sup> Doris, *Lack of Character*, 45.

<sup>46</sup> Haney, Banks and Zimbardo, "Simulated Prison," 69-97.

<sup>47</sup> Doris, *Lack of Character*, 31.

<sup>48</sup> Alfano, *Character as Moral Fiction*, 31-32.

<sup>49</sup> For the view that Plato held this strong thesis, see Wolf, "Unity of the Virtues," 145-167.

<sup>50</sup> See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, (hereafter EN unless otherwise specified), 6.13.1144b33-1145a2.

<sup>51</sup> Doris, *Lack of Character*, 23.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>53</sup> See Doris, *Lack of Character*, 58.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>55</sup> I read Harman to be more pessimistic than Doris over this issue for the following reason. When considering Thomson and Merritt's theories in "Moral Psychology," (224) Harman states "although there is clearly much of value in these [theories], I myself think it is better to abandon all thought and talk of character and virtue."

<sup>56</sup> Aristotle, EN 2.4.1105b1.

<sup>57</sup> In *Lack of Character* (17), Doris cites both EN.1.10.1101a1-8 and EN.6.5.1140a26-b30 for this claim about Aristotelian virtue.

<sup>58</sup> Doris, *Lack of Character*, 17. For the claim that virtues are *hexeis*, see Aristotle, EN.2.5.1106a11-12.

<sup>59</sup> Harman, "Moral Psychology," 317.

<sup>60</sup> For example, see Merritt, Doris and Harman, "Character," 359.

<sup>61</sup> Aristotle, EN.6.13.1144b16.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, EN.6.13.1144b14.

<sup>63</sup> Merritt, Doris and Harman, "Character," 365.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 364.

<sup>65</sup> By “adequately instantiated” I mean that virtues are instantiated either perfectly or perfectly enough to allow an agent to act in accordance with most of her moral reasons.

<sup>66</sup> Doris, *Lack of Character*, 112.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 152. For how alienation is argued to be a problem for consequentialist and deontological theories, see Scheffler, *The Rejection of Consequentialism*; Stocker “Schizophrenia,” 453-466; Williams “A Critique of Utilitarianism,” 457-475; and Williams “Persons, Character and Morality,” 634-646.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>69</sup> For a description of the method of reflective equilibrium, see Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*.

<sup>70</sup> My use of the term “prima facie” here is not due to any commitment to Rossian “prima facie duties”. I use this term, rather, because I am not convinced that everyone with the moral point of view will agree that the suffering of innocent sentient beings is bad *without exception*, or deceiving innocent persons is wrong *without exception*. In the former case, there are certain conditions in which the suffering of an innocent person does not seem bad. Chemotherapy causes the suffering of innocent people, for example, but it is necessary to kill cancer cells. In the latter case, there may be certain conditions in which deceiving an innocent person may be morally permissible or even morally required. It may be morally permissible for a parent to deceive a young child, for example, if the child is too emotionally immature to handle a painful truth.

<sup>71</sup> Aristotle, EN 1.7.

<sup>72</sup> Kenny, “Happiness,” 93-102.

<sup>73</sup> In “Good and Evil” (33) Peter Geach claims that ‘good’ is “always” an attributive adjective. For my purposes, however, it is not necessary to be committed to such a thesis.

<sup>74</sup> Aristotle, EN 1.7.1097b33-1098a3.

<sup>75</sup> For a further discussion of this objection to Aristotle’s method, see Hurka, *Perfectionism*, 11.

<sup>76</sup> Thompson, “The Representation of Life,” 28. There may be a slight difference between my use of the phrase “life form” and Thompson’s. Hereafter, I am using the phrase to denote an individual member of a

biological species. This may be what Thompson means by “life form” but he also claims to associate the phrase with “a picture in a field guide.” This seems to suggest that in his use of the phrase, Thompson has in mind an ideal member of a biological species. The way I am using the phrase, however, denotes both ideal and defective members of a species.

<sup>77</sup> In “The Representation of Life,” Thompson claims that it is possible to make natural historical judgments about what a life form characteristically does, even if, statistically, the vast majority of such life forms never act in these characteristic ways. Thus, according to Thompson, based on the natural history of the mayfly, one can truly assert that *The Mayfly breeds in the spring* even if the majority of mayflies do not survive long enough to mate. Judgments about what such life forms as *The Mayfly*, *The Honeybee* and *The Black-Necked Swan* characteristically do therefore take the form of “Aristotelian categoricals”(65) and are not meant to be claims about what individual life forms either do or will be likely to do.

<sup>78</sup> In *Natural Goodness* (30), Foot distinguishes her approach from Thompson’s by stating that, for her, the judgment that “the blue tit has a round blue patch on its head” is different from “the male peacock has a brightly colored tail” because while both features may be characteristic of their respective life forms, a brightly colored tail enables a male peacocks to do what peacocks characteristically do in attracting a mate and therefore promoting the end of reproduction. Thus, having a round blue patch on its head, by itself, does not make a blue tit a good blue tit for Foot, since this characteristic does not have a teleological function, while a brightly colored tail has a teleological function for the male peacock.

<sup>79</sup> In “Morality and Virtue” (538-539), Copp and Sobel raise this kind of objection to Foot and Hursthouse’s view, but for the reasons I am now providing, I think it is more appropriately directed toward Thompson’s view and does not pose a problem for Foot and Hursthouse’s view.

<sup>80</sup> For the claim that the full set of virtues cannot be co-instantiated in the same personality, see Flanagan, *Varieties of Moral Personality*, 33. Flanagan states that “some of the qualities on the list [of all virtues] are inconsistent with one another and would, so to speak, cancel one another out. For example, vivaciousness, forthrightness, and physical courage are virtues. But so are serenity, tactfulness and pacifism.”



<sup>81</sup> Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*, 115.

<sup>82</sup> Despite my claim that the concepts of flourishing and virtuous are vague concepts, it will still be possible to describe a human agent as flourishing or virtuous without making any reference to the degree to which they are flourishing or virtuous. Concepts such as heap, tall, and bald are vague concepts, but it is still possible to describe someone as tall or bald *tout court*. In the same manner, even given my account in which virtue and flourishing are instantiated on a scale, it is still possible to describe a human agent as virtuous or flourishing *tout court*.

<sup>83</sup> This example of the different ways in which members of a species can have different roles is taken from Levy's article "Philippa Foot's Theory," (8).

<sup>84</sup> It may be objected that in simply accepting Flanagan's claim that certain virtues are inconsistent with each other, I have not given sufficient consideration to Aristotle's arguments for the thesis that an agent cannot instantiate a single virtue without instantiating all of them. (See Aristotle, EN 6.13.1144b32-1145a2). However, such a thesis is quite compatible with my own thesis. I do not claim that for a human agent to be virtuous in any way would necessarily preclude her being virtuous in any other way. I am simply making the conditional claim that if some virtues are incompatible with other virtues, then such conflict need not pose a problem for my account.

<sup>85</sup> For a more complete description of this egoism objection to eudaemonist forms of virtue ethics, see Baril, "Welfare in Eudaimonism," 511-535.

<sup>86</sup> What the reasons internalist means by "can be motivated to  $\phi$ " will vary depending on the reasons internalist. For example, see Williams, *Making Sense of Humanity*, 35. Here, Williams claims that one has a good reason to  $\phi$  only if one can be motivated to  $\phi$  through "a sound deliberative route" from one's existing motivations. For others, however, one has a good reason to  $\phi$  only if one would be motivated to  $\phi$  if one were either a fully informed agent or one had only true beliefs which are relevant to  $\phi$ -ing. For this second version of reasons internalism, see Smith, *The Moral Problem*.

<sup>87</sup> For a version of this objection, see Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism*, 187-188.

<sup>88</sup> Aristotle, EN 2.4.1105a34.

<sup>89</sup> In order to be clear about this claim that a life-form's characteristic ways of promoting certain ends is normative for the life form, it is necessary to distinguish two ways of making judgments with words like 'ought' or 'should' for particular life forms. It will be granted that sometimes when one makes a statement like 'All turtles ought to have hard shells', one is not making a normative judgment. If every turtle one has ever seen has had a hard shell, one could say 'All turtles ought to have a hard shells' without this statement being normative. In such a case, one could preserve the meaning of this statement without the word 'ought' by saying 'it is likely that all turtles have hard shells'. But it is also possible to make a statement of the form 'All turtles ought to have a hard shell' without such a statement having anything to do with the probability or likelihood that a particular turtle has a hard shell. For example, even if the majority of turtles one has seen have soft shells, one could still say 'All turtles ought to have hard shells'. In such a case, one would be stating one's belief that these soft shelled turtles are defective when it comes to promoting the three ends.

<sup>90</sup> Kant, *Grounding*, 421.

<sup>91</sup> My claim that apart from practical wisdom an agent may not know the right means to achieving a virtuous end does not mean that practical wisdom or *phronesis* is sufficient for knowing such means. I claim that *phronesis* is neither necessary nor sufficient for knowing such means. In *Nicomachean Ethics* (6.5.1140a25-28), Aristotle claims that is characteristic of the *phronimos* to be able to deliberate well. However, while someone who is able to deliberate well will make good judgments, this does not mean that they cannot make mistaken judgments or that someone who is unable to deliberate well cannot make correct judgments.

<sup>92</sup> Aristotle, EN 6.12.1144a7-9.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 7.8.1151a18-19.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 6.13.1144b16-18.

<sup>95</sup> Kant, *Grounding*, 397.

<sup>96</sup> Aristotle, EN 7.9.1151b33-1152a4.

<sup>97</sup> Aristotle thus states that one can tell who is the more courageous agent when sudden alarms arise better than one can tell in alarms which are foreseen and leave time for planning. Ibid., 3.8.1117a17-20.

<sup>98</sup> In translating *prohaeresis* as “commitment” rather than “choice”, because I am persuaded by Charles Chamberlin’s claim in “The Meaning of Prohairesis,” (156) that this is a better way of translating this term. According to Chamberlin, since Aristotle denies that acts with *prohaeresis* can be performed suddenly (EN 3.2.1111b10) it seems inaccurate to translate *prohaeresis* as “choice” rather than “commitment”. Choices can be made suddenly, but commitments take time.

<sup>99</sup> Aristotle, EN 3.8.1117a20-22.

<sup>100</sup> See, for example McDowell, “Aristotle’s Moral Psychology,” 107-128; Sorabji, “Intellect in Virtue,” 107-129; and Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*.

<sup>101</sup> Moss “Virtue Makes the Goal Right,” 251-252.

<sup>102</sup> For Aristotle’s claims that *phantasia* takes place in the non-rational part of the soul, see *Eudemian Ethics*, 7.2.1235b28-29. For the claim that non-rational animals are capable of *phantasia*, see EN 7.3.1147b4-5 and *On the Soul*, 3.3.429a5-8. For Aristotle’s claim that *phantasia* is cognitive, see *Movement of Animals*, 700b17-20.

<sup>103</sup> See Aristotle, EN 3.4.1113a23-33.

<sup>104</sup> For such an objection, see Sorabji, “Intellect in Virtue,” 118.

<sup>105</sup> Aristotle, EN 6.13.1144b16-17.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 1.7.1098a1-5.

<sup>107</sup> Aristotle, EN 6.13.1144b8-18.

<sup>108</sup> See both Williams, “A Critique of Utilitarianism,” 457-475, and Williams “Persons, Character and Morality,” 634-646.

<sup>109</sup> In “Persons, Character and Morality” (637-642), Williams thus claims that “an individual..has a set of desires, concerns, or as I shall call them, projects, which help to constitute a character...my present

projects are the condition of my existence in the sense that unless I am propelled forward by the conatus of desire, project and interest, it is unclear why I should go on at all.”

<sup>110</sup> Scheffler, *The Rejection of Consequentialism*, 8.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 10. Scheffler claims that “every consequentialist theory” can alienate agents from their morally acceptable ground projects, but I think that Scheffler must mean every consequentialist theory *which requires agents to deliberate as consequentialists*. Scheffler thus says that consequentialism’s “conception of the right” is what holds an agents’ morally permissible projects “hostage”. But I don’t see how a conception of the right can do this for an agent who does not deliberate about such a conception.

<sup>113</sup> A self-effacing form of utilitarianism would not require deliberating about the best consequences even though it would define rightness in terms of the best consequences.

<sup>114</sup> See Scheffler, *The Rejection of Consequentialism* and Slote, “Satisficing Consequentialism,” 165-176.

<sup>115</sup> By “neo-Kantians”, I simply mean those who are engaged in the project of interpreting Kant and defending Kant against modern criticisms.

<sup>116</sup> In *Grounding* (398) Kant thus says “Suppose that, when no longer motivated by any inclination, [an agent] tears himself out of this deadly insensibility and does the action without any inclination for the sake of duty alone; then for the first time his action has its genuine moral worth.” Unlike Kant, Ross does not say that actions which are done apart from the motive of duty lack any moral worth, but morally, they are clearly better than those which are done apart from the motive of duty. See Ross, *The Right and The Good*, 159-164.

<sup>117</sup> Stocker, “Schizophrenia,” 456-466.

<sup>118</sup> Herman, “Motive of Duty,” 376.

<sup>119</sup> Williams, “Persons, Character and Morality,” 646. Although the target of Bernard Williams’ argument that certain deontological theories can require agents to engage in “one thought too many” was Charles Fried’s *An Anatomy of Values*, it is not clear to me that Fried’s theory actually requires moral agents to

deliberate about the moral status of their acts at all. In "Motive of Duty" (374) however, it seems to me that Barbara Herman does. When discussing the motive of duty as a limiting condition on morally permissible motives, she states "once I am aware of what I want to do, I must consider whether it is morally permissible. If I have an effective motive of duty, I will act only when I determine that it is."

<sup>120</sup> Baron, "The Alleged Moral Repugnance," 212.

<sup>121</sup> Kamtekar, "Situationism and Virtue Ethics," 466.

<sup>122</sup> Sreenivasan, "Error about Errors," 59.

<sup>123</sup> Kamtekar, "Situationism and Virtue Ethics," 466.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Isen and Levin, "Effects of Feeling Good," 387.

<sup>126</sup> Darley and Batson, "From Jerusalem to Jericho," 105.

<sup>127</sup> Aronson, Brewer and Carlsmith, "Experimentation in Social Psychology," 482.

<sup>128</sup> Patten, "Milgram's Shocking Experiments," 430.

<sup>129</sup> Milgram, "Behavioral Study of Obedience," 375.

<sup>130</sup> Patten, "Milgram's Shocking Experiments," 432.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 432.

<sup>132</sup> Banuazizi and Movadehi, "Interpersonal Dynamics in a Simulated Prison," 154.

<sup>133</sup> Montmarquet, "Character and Social Science," 365.

<sup>134</sup> Bem and Allen, "Predicting Some of the People," 512.

<sup>135</sup> Shoda, Mischel and Wright, "Intraindividual Stability," 674-687.

<sup>136</sup> Epstein, "The Stability of Behavior," 1120.

<sup>137</sup> Shoda, Mischel and Wright, "Intraindividual Stability," 684.

<sup>138</sup> See Webber, "Virtue, Character and Situation," 197.

<sup>139</sup> Miller, "Social Psychology, Mood and Helping," 148.

<sup>140</sup> Blevins and Murphy, "Feeling Good and Helping," 326.

<sup>141</sup> Miller, "Social Psychology, Mood and Helping," 149.

<sup>142</sup> Levin and Isen, "Further Studies," 146.

<sup>143</sup> Weyant and Clark, "Dimes and Helping," 109.

<sup>144</sup> Ross and Nisbett, *The Person and The Situation*, 107.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>147</sup> To be more precise, the actual correlation coefficients were in the range of .40-.60, but in "The Stability of Behavior" (1120) Seymour Epstein explains that most of these correlation coefficients would be about .10 higher if they were "corrected for attenuation due to unreliability."

<sup>148</sup> Goldie, *On Personality*, 98.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 99-100.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>151</sup> Doris, *Lack of Character*, 9.

<sup>152</sup> Winter and Tauer, "Virtue Theory and Social Psychology," 81.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>154</sup> Sabini and Silver, "Lack of Character?" 560.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 558.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 540.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 561.

<sup>158</sup> Compare Arpaly "Comments," 643-647; Fleming "The Character of Virtue," 24-42; Kupperman "The Indispensability of Character," 239-250; Miller "Social Psychology and Virtue Ethics," 365-392; and Winter and Tauer, "Virtue Theory and Social Psychology," 73-86; with De Paul "Character Traits, Virtues and Vices," 141-157; and Merritt, "Situationist Personality Psychology," 365-383.

<sup>159</sup> Merritt, "Situationist Personality Psychology," 379.

<sup>160</sup> Hume, *Enquiry*, 84.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>163</sup> Miller, "Social Psychology and Virtue Ethics," 378.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 379.

<sup>165</sup> De Paul, "Character Traits, Virtues and Vices," 151.

<sup>166</sup> Kametekar, "Content of Our Character," 473.

<sup>167</sup> Solomon, "Victims of Circumstance?" 53.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Annas, "Comments," 636-642; Athanassoulis, "A Response to Harman," 215-221; Kametekar "Content of Our Character," 458-491; Kristjánsson, "Aristotelian Critique of Situationism," 55-76; Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*; Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence*; Swanton, *Virtue Ethics*; and Webber, "Virtue, Character and Situation," 193-213.

<sup>171</sup> For two examples of these arguments, see Annas, "Comments," 636-642; and Athanassoulis, "A Response to Harman," 215-221.

<sup>172</sup> At least by the lights of situationists such as Doris. See Doris, *Lack of Character*, 15-16 and 19.

<sup>173</sup> Aristotle, EN1.10.1100b32-34.

<sup>174</sup> Athanassoulis, "A Response to Harman," 218.

<sup>175</sup> Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*, 315.

<sup>176</sup> Driver, "The Virtues and Human Nature," 117-118.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>178</sup> Thomson, "The Right and the Good," 280.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>180</sup> Miller, "Social Psychology and Virtue Ethics," 392.

<sup>181</sup> For the effects of noise levels, music, aromas and weather on helping behavior, see; Baron, "Sweet Smell," 498-503; Cunningham "Weather, Mood and Helping," 1947-1956; Mathews and Canon, "Environmental Noise Level," 571-577; and North et al "Effects of Music," 266-275, respectively.

<sup>182</sup> In "Content of Our Character" (466), Kamtekar thus states that she is concerned about "what we should infer about adults from observations of children's cross-situational inconsistency or narrowness of disposition—might children not be more impressionable, less committed to ideals of conduct, or less integrated than adults?"

<sup>183</sup> Mischel and Peake, "Cross-Situational Consistency", 736; Dudycha, "An Objective Study of Punctuality," 1-53.

<sup>184</sup> Doris, *Lack of Character*, 45.

<sup>185</sup> For a helpful discussion of the issues of experimental and mundane realism, see Aronson, Brewer and Carlsmith, "Experimentation in Social Psychology," 1-79.

<sup>186</sup> Doris, *Lack of Character*, 44.

<sup>187</sup> In fact, a full 80 percent were certain that the "learner" was receiving painful shocks, according to Doris. *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 65

<sup>189</sup> In some cases, situationists would even say this about intra-situational character traits. Harman, for example, is skeptical of the existence of narrow traits such as "test-taking honesty". See Harman, "Moral Psychology," 315-331.

<sup>190</sup> Sabini and Silver express such hopes in "Lack of Character?" (542).

<sup>191</sup> Doris, *Lack of Character*, 75.

<sup>192</sup> Along with Shoda and Wright, in "Intraindividual Stability" (684) Mischel thus claims that "individual differences in behaviors [are] much more consistent within the same types of psychological situations, even when they [are] sampled from diverse nominal situations, than [are] individual differences in different psychological situations also sampled across diverse nominal situations."



<sup>193</sup> In *Lack of Character* (80), Doris raises this objection. For another example of this objection, see Alfano, *Character as Moral Fiction*, 79.

<sup>194</sup> In *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues* (329), Russell seems to make this point when he argues that the kind of consistency of behavior that one strives to attain in being virtuous is not just “nominal consistency” but a consistency which is “responsive to reasons that can be endorsed...within an ethical outlook in equilibrium.”

<sup>195</sup> Alfano, *Character as Moral Fiction*, 101.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>198</sup> Doris, *Lack of Character*, 32.

<sup>199</sup> See for example, Athanassoulis, “A Response to Harman,” 215-221; Arpaly “Comments,” 643-647; De Paul “Character Traits, Virtues and Vices,” 141-157; Fleming “The Character of Virtue,” 24-42; Kristjánsson, “Aristotelian Critique of Situationism,” 55-76; Kupperman, “The Indispensability of Character,” 239-250; Miller, “Social Psychology and Virtue Ethics,” 365-392; Swanton, *Virtue Ethics*; Sreenivasan, “Error about Errors,” 47-68; and Webber, “Virtue, Character and Situation,” 193-213.

<sup>200</sup> Doris, “Replies,” 665.

<sup>201</sup> See Aristotle, EN 7.10.1152a25-27 and EN 10.9.1179b11-16.

<sup>202</sup> As Aristotle claims, for example. (See Aristotle, EN 1106b36-1107a2; EN 1139a21-25 and EN 1115b11-20). Also see Foot who claims in *Virtues and Vices* (5), that “a virtue such as generosity lies as much in someone’s attitude as in his actions.”

<sup>203</sup> Doris, *Lack of Character*, 31.

<sup>204</sup> For an example of one longitudinal study which would appear to provide strong evidence for the existence of trans-situational character traits, see Barbu’s “Studies in Children’s Honesty”. But as Doris points out in *Lack of Character* (195), Barbu’s report is unreliable, since it is very brief, and some of his data has been lost.

<sup>205</sup> See Sreenivasan, "Error about Errors," 65.

<sup>206</sup> Bem and Allen "Predicting Some of the People," 506-520.

<sup>207</sup> As Ross and Nisbett point out in *The Person and the Situation* (104), for those they identified as belonging to a "high consistency subgroup" Bem and Allen found trans-situational correlations of .61 and .48 for friendliness and conscientiousness, respectively. However, Bem and Allen's "longitudinal" study included very few measures of observable behavior and their trans-situational correlations were inflated by the results of paper and pencil tests.

<sup>208</sup> See Doris, *Lack of Character*, 65.

<sup>209</sup> As Doris claims "if people cannot be virtuous, there appears to be something dubious about an ethical theory that prescribes that they be so." *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>210</sup> I am defining "globalist virtue ethics" as any virtue ethical theory which defines the virtues as a set of temporally stable and cross-situationally consistent character traits, and which prescribes their development.

<sup>211</sup> Adams, *A Theory of Virtue*, 130.

<sup>212</sup> Alfano, *Character as Moral Fiction*.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>214</sup> With respect to the virtue of honesty, for example, in *A Theory of Virtue* (128), Adams argues that "we have grouped together under the label 'honesty' a variety of different traits that are commended by rather different *reasons* and have quite different psychological structures and roles." (emphasis added)

<sup>215</sup> Mischel, "Interaction," 346-347.

<sup>216</sup> In Chapter Three, I stated that Merritt favors the former strategy, while both Sabini and Silver and Goldie favor the latter strategy; cf. Merritt, "Situationist Personality Psychology," 365-383; with Sabini and Silver, "Lack of Character?" 535-562; and Goldie, *On Personality*.

<sup>217</sup> As Prinz claims in "The Normativity Challenge" (124), this is due to the "ubiquitous" nature of situational pressures.

<sup>218</sup> In “The Right and the Good” (280) for example, Thomson says that “just people” are just “only derivatively, in the sense that they are prone to performing just acts.”

<sup>219</sup> Such a theory would change the direction of fit between virtues and right (virtuous) acts from what one finds in Hursthouse’s *On Virtue Ethics*, for example, where a right action is defined as “what a virtuous person would do in the circumstances.” (28)

<sup>220</sup> It is worth noting that Doris accepts this theory as well. See Doris, “Replies,” 372.

<sup>221</sup> Verplanken and Faes have a similar definition in their “Implementation Intentions” (594), as does Bargh in “The Four Horsemen of Automaticity,” (1-40).

<sup>222</sup> Latané and Darley, *The Unresponsive Bystander*, 124.

<sup>223</sup> Bargh, Chen and Burrows, “Automaticity and Social Behavior,” 230-244.

<sup>224</sup> See Beaman et al., “Increasing Helping Rates,” 406-411.

<sup>225</sup> Doris makes this point in “Replies,” 388.

<sup>226</sup> In “Two Cheers for Virtue,” (315) Railton calls these habits “habitudes”.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 315.

<sup>228</sup> Annas, “Virtue Ethics and Social Psychology,” 24.

<sup>229</sup> Verplanken and Faes use this term in “Implementation Intentions” (592).

<sup>230</sup> Although practical wisdom aids those who have the virtues in being able to deliberate well, it should be clear that not only can one exercise the virtues without deliberating, but one can also deliberate without being virtuous. For Aristotle, *phronesis* aids the virtuous person in finding the right means to a virtuous end, but he does not claim that *the phronimos* is the only one who deliberates or even the only one who deliberates effectively. One can also deliberate effectively without virtuous ends, and in such a case what one has is not practical wisdom, but cleverness. (See Aristotle, EN 6.12.1144a22-31).

<sup>231</sup> See Baumeister et al., “Ego Depletion,” 1252-1265. See also Muraven, Tice and Baumeister, “Self-Control as Limited Resource,” 774-789.

<sup>232</sup> See Conner, Norman and Bell, "Healthy Eating," 194-201; Mullen, Hersey and Iverson "Health Behavior Models Compared," 973-983; and Verplanken and Faes "Implementation Intentions," 591-604.

<sup>233</sup> Armitage, "Planned Behavior," 235-245. Armitage's study was only twelve weeks long, so it is impossible to say how long those who were still exercising daily at the end of the study persisted in their new routines.

<sup>234</sup> Bower and Reitman, "Mnemonic Elaboration," 478-485.

<sup>235</sup> Bouton and Peck, "Spontaneous Recovery," 313-321.

<sup>236</sup> Robert Bjork, who supports this conclusion in his "Recency and Recovery," (221) thus claims that "it is common knowledge among coaches and skilled athletes that earlier learned swings, styles and techniques that have been replaced can often recover or reappear over time."

<sup>237</sup> Aristotle, EN 3.2.1111b7-8.

<sup>238</sup> By "not voluntary," I mean what Aristotle calls either "non-voluntary" or "involuntary."

<sup>239</sup> Aristotle, EN 3.1.1109b35-1110a4.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 3.1.1110a17-19.

<sup>241</sup> Aristotle, EN 3.1.111a22-26.

<sup>242</sup> Milgram, "Behavioral Study of Obedience," 375.

<sup>243</sup> Schnall et al. "Disgust in Moral Judgment," 1099.

<sup>244</sup> The claim "situational stimuli can impair one's moral judgments" is admittedly ambiguous, as it could merely mean that situational stimuli can affect verdictive beliefs, or it could also mean that situational stimuli could affect judgments about moral principles. In *Moral Realism* (267-268), Shafer-Landau claims that "verdictive beliefs" are judgments about act tokens, such as "it is wrong for me to press this button and torture Bob" rather than judgments about types of acts such as "it is wrong to torture innocent people". I think there can be little doubt that situational stimuli can affect verdictive beliefs, but I am also willing to grant that there is sufficient experimental data to show that they can even affect an agent's judgments about moral principles.

<sup>245</sup> By limiting the effects of situational pressures to what agents have an all-things-considered reason for doing, I am not suggesting that agents cannot make serious errors in their moral judgments. In this chapter, I have already granted that the moral errors which the situationist studies show are prevalent are far more serious than the mistakes of someone who simply lacks practical wisdom. However, even when they make serious moral errors, moral agents can still act for a moral reason and they can respond to the demands of a virtue, even if it not the most important virtue in a given situation.

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